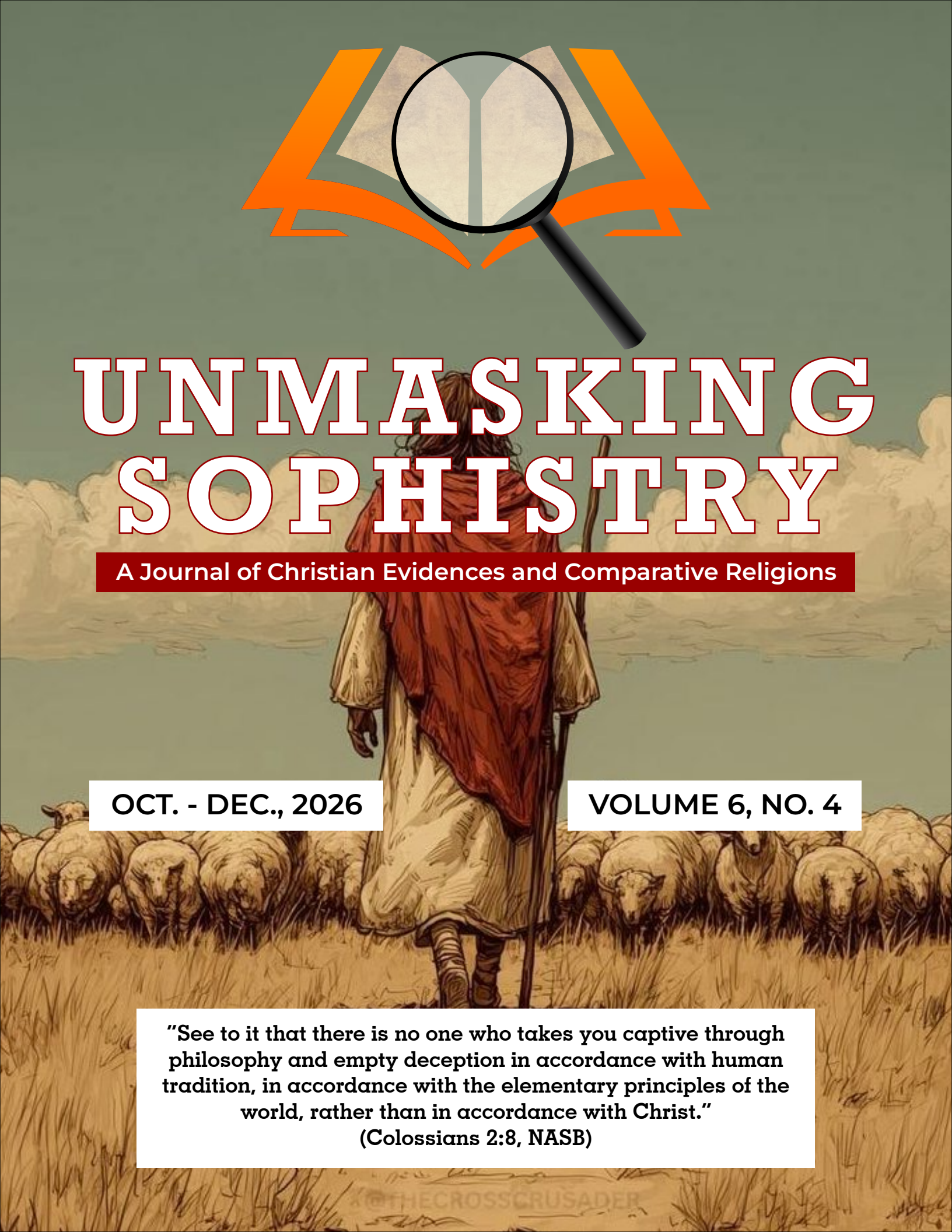


UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

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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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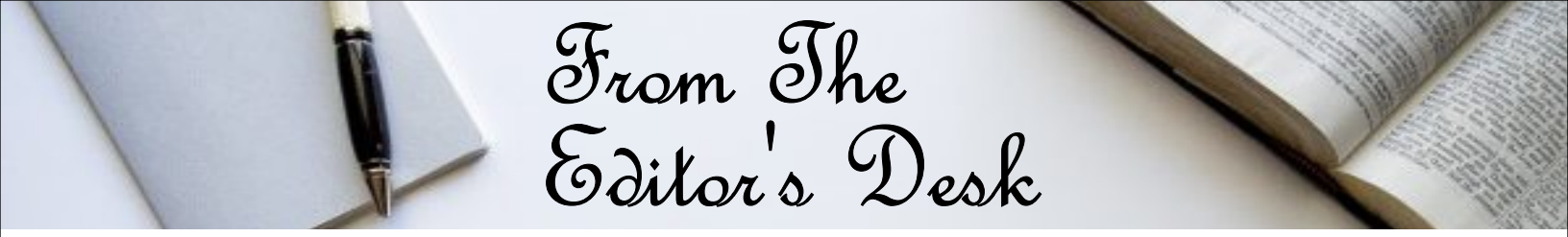
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From The Editor's Desk

Welcome to the twenty-fourth edition of *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine* and the fourth issue published in 2026. By the grace of God, what began as a modest effort to defend the truth and expose error has continued, 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 defence 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 *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*, *Church Cooperation: An Historical Perspective*, and several other subjects intended to strengthen the faith of God's people.

In this edition, readers will find studies on *Many Infallible Proofs*, *Confusion Among Religious People*, *Does James 1:27 Authorize Church Action?*, *"Raccoon" John Smith's Turn from Calvinism*, *Can We Turn the World Upside Down?*, *The Relationship Between the Individual Christian, Christian Groups and the Church*, *Did Jesus Hate the Poor?*, *Christians and Ceremonies and* other good topics. We trust that these contributions will 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, encouragement, and constructive feedback we continue to receive from our readers around the world. Your support has been a tremendous source of encouragement and has strengthened our resolve to continue this work.

As always, we remain committed to "hold fast the pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13) and to continue steadfastly in "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). It is our earnest prayer that every reader will approach the studies contained in this issue with an open Bible and an honest heart, testing all things and holding fast to that which is good. May the Lord richly bless you as you study His Word.

God's love and blessings.
Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba
Editor

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

Many Infallible Proofs

By Terry Wane Benton

"To whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3 NKJV).

Luke was convinced that the evidence for Jesus's being the Messiah and Son of God was so strong that he could write out a portion of it for a governor (Theophilus) to check out and that he could not refute it. Nobody can reasonably refute the "*many infallible proofs,*" not even to this day.

Luke was convinced that Jesus' resurrection from death was not an empty claim that could easily be disproven because Jesus "*presented Himself alive by many infallible proofs*" (Acts 1:3). Strong says the word "*infallible proofs*" is a criterion for certainty, "defining a fact." Thayer says it means "that from which something is surely and plainly known; an indubitable evidence, a proof." So, as Luke opens up his second "account" of the impact of Jesus, he challenges Theophilus to consider the powerful evidence of Jesus' factual resurrection, which is proven with *many* (not a few) hard and certain proofs. It is not just a *possible* conclusion but an absolute fact, "*demonstrated*" (Romans 1:4) with many *infallible* or uncontestable facts. If we combined Luke's two books (Luke and Acts) the many incontestable proofs would include the evidence of:

· The timing of Jesus' birth and life. It was at the right time, prophesied by the prophets. See Daniel 2,9.

· He was born at the right place, as prophesied by Micah 5:2. The right time and right place, with the right proof of established lineage from King David from either parent who went back to Bethlehem for census registry at the right time.

· He was to have a forerunner that acted as a harbinger to the coming king and kingdom (John the Baptizer). All right in harmony with prophetic scripture (Isaiah 40; Malachi 4:4f). John prepared the way for that Messiah, and Jesus fit the bill perfectly.

· The miracles of Jesus were so well known that no Jew of the time or for centuries could deny the factual nature of those miracles (Acts 2:22). Peter stood up in the face of thousands gathered on Pentecost and dared any to deny Jesus' miracles, saying "*as you yourselves also know*." Neither would any governor contest the miracle claims. Herod had heard of these and was in town and hoped to get a glimpse of one of Jesus' miracles. Theophilus could not deny either of Luke's records regarding Jesus' miracles.

· His predicted rejection (both by the prophets and by Jesus Himself) and its happening is not proof against Him being the Messiah but actually is further proof that He is the Messiah. The Psalmist called Him "*the stone rejected by you builders,*" and Isaiah said He was not bruised for His own iniquities but for ours (Isaiah 53).

· The timing and means of death. Whereas stoning was the usual method of execution, the means of execution by crucifixion fit the "hands and feet pierced" description of Psalm 22, and the timing of the Passover, the great shadow form seen in the great deliverance of Israel from bondage described in Exodus 12, show God designed the timing.



· The predicted resurrection was foreshadowed in several events recorded in the Old Testament, predicted in several prophecies, and then further predicted by Jesus Himself, which meant that Jesus proved Himself infallibly to have power over death. This is the foundational miracle of all miracles. If Jesus remained in the grave after three days, His movement and kingdom were over for good.

· There were efforts to ensure that his tomb was guarded so that no resurrection claim could be made, and yet after 3 days, His tomb was empty, and no guards could produce the body to shut down His followers. There were numerous eyewitnesses, and they all agreed with the Pharisees' own scriptures. The proof was right there in the city where the crucifixion took place. It was too powerful to refute.

· The circumstances of the empty tomb, guarded but now empty after the three days predicted, disarmed all opponents from being able to provide credible counter-proof. The proof was all on the side of Jesus and His disciples, and all fair-minded examiners were moved by the evidence to side with Jesus and His disciples.

· The various eyewitnesses were not going to be intimidated into silence. This change in them is another very remarkable proof.

· The unbreakable conviction of these witnesses as their testimony spread from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, changing the world and causing men to acknowledge the impact of Jesus so that even the calendar would change to reflect "the Year of Our Lord."

Luke includes case after case, preaching the resurrected Jesus from place to place. Any counter-evidence has never refuted the case for Jesus. The testimony has withstood every challenge for 2000 years. Jesus did indeed present Himself alive by "*many infallible proofs*." That evidence proves beyond reasonable doubt that God is real, there is life beyond the grave, and heaven is real for those who would let Jesus into their lives by being baptized into union with Him and living faithfully to Him. Heaven is not just an empty wish! It is real! We can know a Man who demonstrated that He came from there and returned there to prepare a place for you if you want it! We hope you do!

MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH

How do we win the fight against fleshly lusts? Several answers come to mind. Pray. Fill your heart with God's word. Fill your time with spiritually beneficial activities. Associate with people who will influence you for good. In Romans 13:14 Paul identifies another key: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

To make provision for something is to think ahead, to make plans, to provide opportunities. Paul's word literally means forethought. Its other occurrence is in Acts 24:2, where the lawyer Tertullus praised Felix, the governor, because through his "providence" beneficial reforms had been planned and were occurring throughout the land.

Obviously, making no provision for the flesh requires that we not plan ways of fulfilling illegitimate carnal lusts. But it goes beyond that. It requires that we think ahead and, when possible, avoid even the opportunity for such conduct. Here is the principle in action.

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World Religions

Confusion Among Religious People

By David Olajire | Ijebu Ode, Nigeria

Introduction

Go around your street, visit all the churches in your street, and you will conclude with me that there is confusion amongst those who call themselves Christians. One church may teach that putting on footwear to worship is a sin, while another will teach that not putting on footwear is a sin because it is unclean. A church may say that women are not permitted to lead in worship, while another church just on the same street will permit a woman to do anything in worship. Visit a new church, and you will find yourself trying to adjust to their pattern because it is completely different from the one you were attending.

Some people try to escape the fact of this confusion in Christianity by claiming that God calls everyone into different ministries and since they call on the name of God, that is fine. At first, this shows they do not understand the Scriptures because the Bible already made it clear that many who call on the name of the Lord will find themselves in hell (Matthew 7:21-23). Secondly, they are not sincere because they themselves will agree that there are some churches they would not go to; they do not believe they are from God.

We do not have to sit, cross our legs, and do nothing. We must ask ourselves if God is pleased with the confusions in Christianity. Interestingly, the confusion is not only in church doctrines; it is even in the practices of some churches or church leaders. Most people are confused as to who can be called a man of God or one with the Spirit of God because most people who claim to have the Spirit of God in overflowing measures are caught in the worst sinful practices, including fetishism. There are such cases everywhere. We need to seek to know why these exist. Honestly, we cannot imagine that this was so during the time of the Apostles; we have missed the mark somewhere along the line.

Our aim will be to:

· Open our eyes to the confusion that is now in Christianity

· Show why these confusions exist in Christianity

· Help us escape the confusion

Proposition 1: The Confusion Is Not from God

A. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). God is a God of order, not disorder. Any confusion we see in the religious world cannot be traced back to Him. He has given us a clear revelation, a clear pattern, and a clear way of salvation. Confusion comes from another source.

B. Jesus prayed for oneness among Christians (John 17:20-21). Just before His death, Jesus prayed that His followers would be one, even as He and the Father are one. This prayer was not for division, but for unity. The existence of thousands of conflicting denominations is a direct contradiction to the heart of Christ's prayer.

C. The apostles prayed against confusion and acted against confusion (Acts 15:6-11; 1 Corinthians 1:10). When the apostles saw division rising, they addressed it. Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." They did not celebrate diversity of doctrine; they condemned it.

D. Christianity should not be a religion of diversity (Ephesians 4:4-6; Galatians 1:8-9). Paul makes it clear that there is only one body, one Spirit, one hope, one



Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. And if anyone preaches a different gospel, even if he is an angel, he is to be accursed.

Proposition 2: Reasons for the Confusion

A. Men refuse to love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Paul warns that those who do not love the truth will be given over to strong delusion. The confusion we see today exists because people have rejected the truth and have chosen to believe lies. When people prefer comfort over correction, confusion follows.

B. Men are belly seekers (Philippians 3:18-19; Titus 1:10-11). Paul speaks of those whose god is their belly. These are men who preach for profit, who twist the gospel for financial gain, who say what people want to hear so they can receive money and support. They are not serving the Lord; they are serving themselves.

C. Men love to have disciples (Acts 20:30; Matthew 23:15). Jesus warned that the scribes and Pharisees would travel land and sea to make one proselyte, and when they succeeded, they made him twice as much a child of hell as themselves. Similarly, some religious leaders today are more concerned with building their own followers than building the Kingdom of God.

D. Men love position (3 John 9; Matthew 23:5-7). Diotrephes loved to have the preeminence. The Pharisees loved the best seats in the synagogues. Many religious leaders today seek titles, positions, and influence. They are not interested in serving; they are interested in being served. Their pride leads to division and confusion.

Proposition 3: How to Become Free from the Confused Crowd

A. Study the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 17:11). The only way to escape confusion is to know the truth. We must study the Word of God diligently, just as the Bereans did. We must not rely on what men say; we must search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so. The Bible is our only standard.

B. Reject all errors (Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 6:20-21). Paul commands us to mark those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine we have learned and to avoid them. We must not tolerate false teaching or false teachers. We must love the truth enough to reject everything that contradicts it.

C. Hold fast to the truth (1 Corinthians 15:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). We must stand firm in the gospel we have received. We must hold the traditions that have been delivered to us. We must not be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14). We must anchor ourselves to the Word.

D. Be faithful till the end (Revelation 2:10; Matthew 24:13). It is not enough to start well; we must finish well. Many will fall away from the faith, but those who endure to the end will be saved. Faithfulness requires perseverance.

Continued on pg. 14



DISCOURSE

James 1:27: The Responsibility Of The Individual Christian Or The Local Church?

Article: Richmond Ofosu Gyamfi | **Church of Christ**

Response: Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | **Church of Christ**

The topic for discussion in this section concerns the interpretation and application of James 1:27, particularly the responsibility of Christians and the local church in caring for orphans and widows. Richmond Ofosu Gyamfi argues that the passage supports the church's involvement in such benevolent activities, while Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba responds by examining the context of the passage and the biblical distinction between individual and congregational responsibilities. Their exchange is presented here for readers to examine the arguments in the light of Scripture.

James 1:27: Where Does The Text Say "individuals Only"?

By Richmond Ofosu Gyamfi | Church of Christ

Does James 1:27 teach individual responsibility? Certainly. Does it therefore teach that congregations are forbidden to participate in caring for orphans and widows? That conclusion requires proof.

My first question is straightforward: Can a local congregation practice pure and undefiled religion? If the answer is yes, then I have no issue. If the answer is no, explain what kind of religion a congregation is supposed to practice!

However, let us address the actual argument rather than trade assertions. Those who make such claim must prove the word "only" or prove "not for congregations but individuals only"

James 1:27 establishes the responsibility to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. It does not say that this care must be undertaken "by individuals only." It does not say, "A congregation must not participate." Neither does it expressly discuss a treasury or prescribe a particular administrative arrangement.

You cannot turn an instruction establishing personal responsibility into a prohibition against congregational assistance merely by inserting the word "only." What interpretive rule justifies that insertion?

The singular and plural language does not support your claimed exclusion. James addresses his readers as brethren. In James 1:19, he addresses his beloved brethren. In verse 21, he speaks of their souls. In verse 22, he directs them to be doers of the word. Is that for individuals only or the congregation? Verse 23 then uses an individual example: someone who hears without doing. Has James suddenly introduced a different moral standard or excluded congregational application because he uses a singular expression? Of course not. He illustrates the responsibility of the people he has been addressing by describing the conduct of a person. That manner of instruction continues into verses 26–27. The singular language does not, by itself, make collective participation unlawful.

There is a difference between saying, "Every Christian must do this," and saying, "Christians are forbidden to undertake this as a congregation." You have established the first. You still need to prove the second.



Their pronoun rule also runs into First Corinthians 16. First Corinthians 16:1 addresses the churches concerning a collection. Verse 2 then gives instructions to each individual contributor. I hope these brethren accept that passage as relevant to congregational giving. Anyone can recognize that individual language can occur within instructions involving congregational action. Why, then, should individual language automatically exclude congregational application in James? If you believe the contexts establish different responsibilities, demonstrate that difference from the contexts. The pronouns alone will not do the work.

James also addresses their conduct when assembled. Immediately after James 1:27, James 2:1–4 condemns partiality in their assembly. The letter concerns both personal conduct and the way believers treat people when gathered together. It cannot reasonably be placed inside an "individuals only" compartment merely because James sometimes describes a single person. This does not make every instruction a direction about church expenditure. It does expose the weakness of their attempt to settle the matter through singular pronouns.

Personal purity does not exclude congregational purity. James 1:27 includes keeping oneself unspotted from the world. Does its personal wording mean that a congregation has no obligation to resist moral corruption? Certainly not. Ephesians 5:25–27 describes Christ's purpose for the church in terms of holiness and freedom from stain. That passage does not settle the administration of benevolence. It demonstrates that personal language about holiness is entirely compatible with holiness having a congregational expression. Consequently, one cannot simply assume that the other responsibility named in James 1:27—care for orphans and widows—excludes congregational participation because the verse addresses personal conduct.

First Timothy 5:16 shows how an actual distinction is established. Paul expressly distinguishes between a believer's responsibility toward widows and the church's responsibility toward those genuinely dependent upon its assistance. The distinction is stated. Family responsibility must not simply be pushed onto the congregation. But notice what the passage also demonstrates: individual and congregational responsibilities can concern the same kind of need.

Therefore, "This is an individual responsibility" does not necessarily mean, "The congregation is forbidden to undertake any corresponding responsibility." Where anyone claims an exclusion, that person must establish it from Scripture. That is the issue you must answer.

Assuming that a duty addressed personally to Christians automatically prohibits congregational participation. James 1:27 plainly establishes personal responsibility. It does not expressly establish your "individuals only" restriction. If anyone believe other passages establish that restriction, present the argument. But do not insert "only" into James's teaching and then demand that everyone recognize your addition as God's command. Requiring biblical authority is right. Claiming biblical authority for a restriction you have not demonstrated is not.



DISCOURSE

Response to Brother Richmond Ofosu Gyamfi

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Church of Christ

Brother Richmond Ofosu Gyamfi,

It is good to hear from you. Based on your comment on James 1:27, I have the following questions for you, and I respectfully request forthright answers to them.

1. If the absence of the word *only* in James 1:27 means that congregational participation cannot be excluded, does the absence of a similar restriction in verse 26 mean that the congregation is also responsible for bridling its tongue?
2. What is the relationship between verses 26 and 27? Do you understand both verses as describing the responsibilities of individual Christians, or do you believe that both also prescribe responsibilities for the local congregation? What textual evidence supports your answer?
3. If you argue that verse 26 also applies to the congregation, how does the congregation, as a collective body, obey the command to bridle its tongue? If you agree that the command is directed to individuals, what principle allows you to distinguish verse 26 from verse 27 while maintaining that verse 27 authorizes collective participation?
4. Does the fact that individuals are commanded to perform a good work automatically authorize the local church to undertake that work as a collective financial programme?
5. Where does the New Testament authorize the particular congregational activity you are defending?
6. Is the absence of a prohibition the same as the presence of authority?
7. If the absence of the word *only* in James 1:27 means that the congregation must be included in the command, would you apply the same reasoning to 1 Corinthians 7:1–4? Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, yet the passage does not say that its instructions concerning marital relations apply to individuals only. Furthermore, since you appeal to Ephesians 5:25–27, which describes the church as Christ's bride, does that description mean that the church, as a collective body, must also perform the marital duties discussed in 1 Corinthians 7:1–4?

I would appreciate forthright answers to these questions as you respond to this message.

My response to your comment

Your argument establishes one limited point: the word *only* does not appear in James 1:27, and the use of singular language alone cannot establish that congregational participation is forbidden. However, you make an unwarranted leap when you move from the observation that the passage contains no express prohibition to the conclusion that congregational participation is therefore permissible. That reasoning is faulty. A passage may not expressly forbid an action without granting authority for that action. The relevant question is whether the proposed activity is supported by the teaching and practice of the New Testament.

Your reference to Ephesians 5:25–27 does not prove that James 1:27 is referring to the church collectively or authorizes the church to undertake a particular benevolent activity. James describes pure religion in terms of caring for orphans and widows in their



affliction and keeping oneself unspotted from the world. This does not mean that the congregation has no responsibility to maintain holiness. Other passages plainly teach the church's responsibility in that regard. Nevertheless, the existence of a collective responsibility in one area does not establish that every responsibility assigned to individual Christians is also an authorized congregational activity.

Consider a simple example. Christians are commanded to pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and the local church also prayed together (Acts 12:5). The fact that individual Christians pray does not make congregational prayer unauthorized. Acts 12:5 provides an example of the church praying collectively. Notice, however, what establishes the collective practice: the New Testament actually records it.

There are responsibilities that belong both to individual Christians and to the local church, but we must establish this from Scripture rather than assume it. Can you provide a New Testament command, approved example, or necessary inference authorizing the range of congregational benevolent activities you are defending? The fact that individual Christians are commanded to perform good works does not automatically establish that every such work may be organized and financed through the congregational treasury. Each proposed collective activity must be considered in light of the New Testament's teaching concerning the work of the church.

You appeal to 1 Corinthians 16, arguing that Paul addresses the churches in verse 1 and then gives instructions concerning individual contributions in verse 2. You conclude that individual language can occur within instructions involving congregational action. That observation is correct, but it does not establish the conclusion you need it to establish.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, Paul explicitly connects the contributions of individual Christians with a collection for the saints. The surrounding context identifies the purpose of that collection. Romans 15:25–26 explains that Paul was going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints and that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had made a contribution for the poor among the saints there.

Thus, 1 Corinthians 16 illustrates how individual contributions can be organized into a congregational collection for an authorized purpose. It does not establish that every responsibility placed upon individuals can be converted into a congregational treasury project. The passage provides instructions for a particular collection serving a particular need. It does not teach that whatever an individual Christian may lawfully do can automatically be undertaken as a collective work of the church.

The distinction is straightforward: 1 Corinthians 16 does not establish congregational authority merely because individuals contribute. It identifies a collection for the saints and gives instructions governing that collection. You ask why individual language should automatically exclude congregational application in James 1:27. My answer is that individual language alone does not settle the question. Neither does the fact that a letter addresses a congregation establish that every instruction in it authorizes a collective programme. The relevant context and the New Testament's teaching concerning the church's work must determine the scope of the responsibility.

Your appeal to 1 Corinthians 16 establishes a principle I readily accept: individual Christians can contribute to an authorized congregational work. It does not establish your desired conclusion that any benevolent work authorized for an individual is



thereby authorized for the local church.

Your appeal to James 2:1–4

You also appeal to James 2:1–4, where James condemns partiality among believers when they assemble. You argue that the letter addresses both personal conduct and the way Christians behave when gathered together. I have no disagreement with that observation. James 2:1–4 demonstrates that Christians must not show partiality when they assemble.

But how does this establish that the church may finance a particular benevolent arrangement? The fact that a letter addresses both individual and collective conduct does not mean that every instruction in that letter authorizes a congregational programme. Different instructions may address different responsibilities and require different applications.

For example, James 1:26 warns against failing to bridle the tongue. James 1:27 describes care for orphans and widows and personal purity as characteristics of pure religion. James 2:1–4 condemns partiality. These teachings concern the lives and conduct of Christians, but they do not all prescribe the same kind of action or establish the same administrative arrangement.

Therefore, the mere fact that James discusses both personal conduct and conduct among assembled Christians does not resolve the question of which benevolent activities the local church is authorized to undertake collectively.

Your appeal to Ephesians 5:25–27

You argue that the reference to keeping oneself pure in James 1:27 does not exclude congregational responsibility for purity. To support this point, you cite Ephesians 5:25–27, which describes Christ's love for the church and His purpose to sanctify it and present it holy and without blemish.

Your point is that personal language about holiness can coexist with a congregational responsibility for holiness. I agree. However, that does not settle the question of benevolent expenditure.

Ephesians 5:25–27 explicitly concerns Christ's relationship with the church and His sanctifying work. It establishes that the church is to be holy. It does not establish that every responsibility associated with an individual Christian's purity or good works may be undertaken as a collective financial programme. A passage can establish a congregational responsibility in one area without authorizing every possible activity in another.

There is also a question of consistency in your use of these passages. You appeal to Ephesians 5:25–27 because the church is described as Christ's bride and because this description establishes a collective dimension to holiness. But does the fact that the church is Christ's bride mean that every instruction concerning human marriage must also be applied to the church collectively?

For instance, 1 Corinthians 7:1–4 discusses the responsibilities of husbands and wives in their marital relationship. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, but that fact does not mean that the church, as a collective body, must perform the marital duties described in the passage. The fact that the church is described as Christ's bride in Ephesians 5 does not change the specific application of Paul's instructions concerning human marriage.

I am not suggesting that the passages are identical in subject or application. Rather, I am asking you to identify the principle by which you determine when an instruction addressed to Christians applies to them individually and when it authorizes an activity



undertaken by the local church collectively. If the audience of a letter, the absence of the word *only*, or a collective description in another passage is sufficient to establish congregational authority, how do you avoid extending that reasoning beyond the context and purpose of the passages concerned?

The same question applies to James 1:27. The fact that the verse does not contain the word *only* does not, by itself, establish that the local church is authorized to undertake every benevolent arrangement that an individual Christian may lawfully perform. You must still demonstrate that the particular collective activity you are defending is authorized by the New Testament.

Conclusion

Brother Richmond, I am not arguing that every instruction expressed in individual terms must necessarily exclude collective application. Nor am I arguing that the local church has no responsibilities concerning benevolence. My question is more specific: **What New Testament authority supports the particular congregational benevolent activity you are defending?**

Surely, the fact that a letter is addressed to a congregation does not make every instruction in it a collective responsibility. Likewise, the fact that the church is described as Christ's bride does not make every instruction concerning human marriage applicable to the church collectively. And the absence of the word *only* in James 1:27 does not, by itself, establish congregational authority.

The issue is not merely whether Scripture expressly excludes a proposed collective activity, but whether the New Testament authorizes the particular activity being defended.

Thank you. I look forward to your response.

CONFUSION AMONG RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

Continued from pg. 8

Proposition 4: Effects of the Confusion

A. It affects one's faith (2 Peter 3:17-18; Matthew 15:14). When there is confusion, many are led astray. Their faith is weakened. They become unstable. Jesus warned that if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a ditch. The confusion in Christianity is causing many to stumble.

B. It ridicules Christ (Romans 2:24; 2 Peter 2:2). When those who call themselves Christians live in confusion, division, and hypocrisy, the name of Christ is blasphemed among the world. The world looks at the chaos in Christianity and mocks the gospel. This is a serious consequence.

C. It affects the society (1 Corinthians 5:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:3-4). Confusion in the church does not stay in the church. It spills over into society. It creates a culture of relativism where everyone does what is right in their own eyes. People no longer know what is true, and that affects their families, their communities, and their nations.

Conclusion

The confusion in Christianity is real, but it is not from God. It exists because men have refused to love the truth, and they have instead loved themselves. They have sought profit, position, and followers rather than the purity of the gospel.

We must escape the confused crowd. We must study the Bible, reject all error, hold fast to the truth, and remain faithful to the end.

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.

W. Curtis Porter recalled meeting Mr. Ralph Green, a representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in 1935 at Leachville, Arkansas, where they engaged in a lengthy debate on several religious propositions.

According to Porter, Jehovah's Witnesses held a materialistic view of human existence, teaching that man is wholly mortal and that death brings complete extinction. In other words, when a man dies, he dies entirely, just like a dead dog. They also rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment.

During their discussion on the punishment of the wicked, Porter maintained that the punishment would be everlasting, citing Matthew 25:46 and Revelation 20:10. Green, however, appealed to 1 Timothy 2:5–6, which describes Jesus Christ as the one who gave Himself as a ransom for mankind. He argued that the word *ransom* means a corresponding price paid for another. Therefore, if the penalty for sin is endless torment, Green reasoned, Jesus Christ must also have suffered endless torment to pay the corresponding ransom for humanity.

Porter responded by turning Green's reasoning against his own doctrine. He pointed out that if the penalty for sin were, as Green maintained, the complete extinction and annihilation of both body and soul, then the same argument about a corresponding ransom would require Jesus Christ to have suffered precisely that fate. In other words, Christ would have had to become utterly extinct, with both body and soul annihilated, to pay the corresponding price for mankind.

Porter then observed that this was the very conclusion Green's argument would lead to if applied consistently. What Green intended as an objection to the doctrine of everlasting punishment had, instead, turned against his own position. Porter described it as a boomerang—a *quibble that backfired*.

W. Curtis Porter recounted an exchange with Brother J. Ervin Waters during a discussion on the Lord's Supper. Waters maintained that only one drinking vessel could be used to serve the congregation the fruit of the vine.

Porter asked what Waters would do if the cup accidentally fell and its contents spilled while he was serving the congregation. Would he obtain another cup and continue serving those who had not yet partaken? Waters replied that he would get another cup and serve the entire congregation.

Porter sought clarification: did he mean that he would also serve those who had already partaken, thereby serving the whole congregation again? Waters answered yes.

Waters then presented an illustration of his own. He asked what Porter would do if, while baptising someone, he slipped and failed to immerse the person completely. Would he immerse the entire person again or merely baptise the part that had not gone under?

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Church History

"Raccoon" John Smith's Turn from Calvinism

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

"Raccoon" John Smith (1784-1868) played a significant role in the history of the Restoration Movement. Not only did he baptize hundreds of people, but he was also instrumental in bringing together the followers of Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone *[which we may discuss in a future article]*. However, like many others who embraced the "restoration plea," he had to reject the popular doctrines of *Calvinism* in order to pursue the "ancient order" found in the New Testament.

What is *Calvinism*? This term is used to describe the system of doctrine popularized by John Calvin (1509-1564). It can be summarized using the "TULIP" acronym.

- **Total depravity** – This is the idea that all mankind is born so depraved that they cannot even choose to turn to God without some direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
- **Unconditional election** – If man is unable to turn to God, then God saving him cannot be based upon any conditions he must meet.
- **Limited atonement** – If the Holy Spirit must perform a direct operation on the heart of a sinner in order to save him, and the Bible teaches that not all will be saved, then the Calvinist believes that Jesus' death was not for *the world*, but only for *the elect*.
- **Irresistible grace** – If someone is part of *the elect*, there is nothing they can do to resist the Holy Spirit's work in saving him.
- **Perseverance of the saints** – If the Holy Spirit regenerated someone (unconditionally and irresistibly) because they were part of *the elect*, then nothing could happen that would cause him to turn from God and lose his salvation.

This doctrine was widely held by religious people of Smith's day. The tenets of the "TULIP" doctrine caused many to believe that in order to be saved, they had to have some supernatural experience or feeling that would prove to them that they were one of the "elect."

Smith's parents were Calvinistic Baptists, and he was raised strictly under that doctrine. As he grew up and became interested in religion, he anxiously waited for a call from the Lord to signal that he was one of the elect. Yet he never had a supernatural experience like others claimed to have, and struggled with the thought that he was a sinner and was unable to be converted.

Barton W. Stone had a similar experience. He grew up under the influence of Calvinism, yet did not have a supernatural conversion experience that would indicate he was saved. He spent a whole year "laboring" and "praying and striving to obtain saving faith, sometimes desponding and almost despairing of ever getting it" (*Men of Yesterday*, p. 39).

Eventually, Smith received some comfort in the thought that he had been converted, despite not having the experience he expected. However, a personal tragedy led him to further question the teachings of Calvinism. In early 1815, a fire destroyed his home, taking the lives of two of his children, Eli and Elvira, who were 7 and 5 years old. His wife Anne, overcome with grief, died soon afterward. Reflecting on the tragedy, Smith struggled to view his young children through the lens of Calvinism, which saw "some as elect, some reprobate" (*Biographies of*



Restoration Pioneers: Volume 1, p. 136). So he moved further from the doctrine of his upbringing.

A few years later, Smith was preaching and urging sinners to repent and believe the gospel. While exhorting the audience thus, he was struck by the inherent inconsistency between this evangelistic plea and the doctrine of Calvinism. What was the point of calling upon sinners to repent if the elect were already safe and the non-elect could not repent? At this thought, he closed his remarks and told the crowd, "Brethren, something is wrong. I am in the dark. We are all in the dark; but how to lead you to the light or find the way myself, before God I know not" (*Men of Yesterday*, p. 77). As Smith turned his attention to a diligent and prayerful study of the Scriptures, he continued to see that the Calvinistic doctrine which he had been taught from his youth was inconsistent with the teachings of the New Testament.

At this time, he also became a subscriber of the *Christian Baptist*, published by Alexander Campbell. Smith was impressed with Campbell's arguments. When the opportunity presented itself, he traveled twenty miles to hear Campbell preach. Mesmerized by his preaching, he listened for two and a half hours while thinking that only thirty minutes had passed (*The Search for the Ancient Order: Volume 1*, p. 247). Afterward, he continued to read Campbell's writings in the *Christian Baptist* and soon became convinced that Calvinism was a false doctrine, and so he "began to urge that people be Christians by believing upon Christ as the Messiah and obeying Him in baptism" (*ibid*. p. 247).

Rejecting Calvinism required Smith to finally break with the Baptists. When this happened, he was told, "Your friends will abandon you; you will get nothing for your preaching; your debts will press you to the earth, and eventually your home must be given up," to which he replied, "Conscience is an article that I have not brought into the market" (*Restoration Principles and Personalities*, p. 117). In other words, he was going to follow what he believed to be right and not compromise his convictions to appease others, regardless of the consequences.

Smith eventually became associated with Barton W. Stone. Stone and his brethren called themselves *Christians*, yet they were sometimes referred to as "New Lights." Smith joined with them because of the common ground they shared in holding to the teachings of the New Testament. Thus, "Raccoon" John Smith left the darkness of Calvinism in favor of the so-called "New Light," which pointed him back to the "ancient order" found in the pages of God's word.

There are some important lessons to learn from Smith's journey.

1. **We need to test what we have been taught to see if it harmonizes with the word of God.** The Bereans were commended for doing this when Paul came preaching to them: "*Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so*" (Acts 17:11). Rather than blindly assuming that what we have been taught is true, we need to search the Scriptures to find out what is true.

2. **We have to be willing to change our views when we come to a better understanding of the truth.** The apostle Paul declared that he "*lived* [his] *life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day*" (Acts 23:1), which led him to change from being an enemy of Christ to a proclaimer of the gospel. Because he refused to offer his conscience for sale, Smith did the same. As we study the Scriptures, if we learn that we have erred in any



point of doctrine or practice, we need to have enough humility to change.

3. We must not allow our relationships with others to prevent us from faithfully following the Lord. Paul wrote, "*For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ*" (Galatians 1:10). It is tempting to compromise our convictions in order to please our family, friends, and others. Yet our first priority needs to be pleasing the Lord.

4. We need to remember that truth is not determined by the opinion of the majority. Even though Calvinism was a popular doctrine in Smith's day (and continues to be today), it is not in harmony with the New Testament. We should not blindly follow the majority, lest we find ourselves on the "*broad* [way] *that leads to destruction*" (Matthew 7:13).

"Raccoon" John Smith made sacrifices to leave the doctrine of Calvinism and follow the simple teachings of the New Testament. Yet he was concerned with truth and doing what was right, and we should be as well. Regardless of what others think about us, let us hold fast the pattern found in the New Testament (2 Timothy 1:13), teaching and practicing what is found there.

MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH

Continued from pg. 6

Teens, when you are planning a date, make no provision for fleshly lusts. Do not go to movies that glorify sensuality and fornication, and thereby arouse desire. Stay away from dances for the same reason. Be selective about parties; skip those where alcohol is featured. Avoid dark, lonely sites that provide the occasion for unchaste behavior.

Parents, when arranging your homes, make no provision for fleshly lusts. It may make me unpopular in some circles to say so, but when you allow your kids to have televisions, phones, and internet-connected computers in their bedrooms, you are providing a world of possibilities for wrong conduct.

Families, when you are purchasing in-home entertainment, make no provision for fleshly lusts. If you don't subscribe to cable or satellite channels which air nudity and "adult" content, there will be no opportunity for any family member to watch it. If you refuse to listen to profanity, you will be much less likely to speak it.

Shoppers, when you are choosing your clothes, make no provision for fleshly lusts. Plenty of modest choices exist for those concerned about such things. Err on the side of caution. Don't underestimate the appeal of exposed or accentuated flesh.

Brethren, when you place membership at a congregation, make no provision for fleshly lusts. Realize up front that you won't always get your way, that others may be more talented than you, that we are all working together for the same cause. Remind yourself of that often and give thought for your brethren.

If you want to know what this last point is doing here, read Paul's illustrations of fleshly conduct in Romans 13:13. Let's not deceive ourselves into thinking that strife, jealousy, and bickering are any less carnal or any less sinful than drunkenness or fornication. No matter the sin, make no provision for fleshly lusts.

- Frank Himmel

BARBS WITH A POINT

Can We Turn The World Upside Down?

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Benin City, Nigeria

"These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." (Acts 17:6, NKJV).

What would it take for the church today to have the kind of influence that makes the world take notice? What would happen if Christians became so committed to the gospel that their communities could not ignore their message, their example, and their devotion to Jesus Christ?

In Acts 17:6, the enemies of the gospel made a remarkable accusation against Paul and his companions: "*These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.*" The statement was intended to condemn them, but it became an extraordinary testimony to the influence of the early Christians. Their preaching was disrupting established beliefs, challenging accepted practices, and calling people to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ. They were not overthrowing governments with weapons or forcing people to accept their beliefs. They were proclaiming a message that demanded a change of heart, a change of allegiance, and a change of life. Through the gospel, people were being delivered from the power of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13). Can we have that kind of influence today? More importantly, are we willing to do what it takes?

A World That Needs Turning

The world has always needed the transforming power of God's word. Humanity's fundamental problem is not merely ignorance, poverty, corruption, immorality, or injustice. Beneath these problems lies the universal problem of sin. *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). Our society offers many solutions to human problems, but no human philosophy, political programme, educational system, or technological advancement can reconcile sinful humanity to God. Only Jesus Christ can provide the redemption that we desperately need (Acts 4:12). This does not mean that Christians should be indifferent to the problems around them. Rather, it means that we must understand the unique mission God has given us. We must bring the good news of salvation to people who need forgiveness, hope, and reconciliation with their Creator.

Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Before His ascension, He commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15–16). This mission was not intended to end with the apostles. The gospel was to be taught to others who would, in turn, teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2). The world still needs the gospel. The question is whether the people who have received it are willing to share it.

The Gospel That Changed The World

The early Christians did not possess the political influence and communication technology available today. Yet the message they preached spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and beyond (Acts 1:8). What made the difference?

First, they believed in the power of the gospel. Paul declared, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). They understood that the gospel was not merely an interesting religious message. It was God's means of bringing salvation to those who would believe and obey Him.



Second, they preached Christ. When Philip went to Samaria, he "preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). When Paul met the Ethiopian eunuch, he began with the Scripture the man was reading and preached Jesus to him (Acts 8:35). At Corinth, Paul determined to know nothing among the people except "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). The early Christians did not make themselves the centre of their message. They pointed people to Jesus, His death, burial, and resurrection, and the salvation available through Him (1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

Third, they preached with courage. When the authorities commanded Peter and John to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, they answered, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Their conviction was stronger than their fear of opposition. The result was not that every hearer accepted the message. Some believed, while others resisted. Nevertheless, the gospel continued to spread. Even persecution scattered believers who went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1–4).

The lesson is clear: the power to change the world is not in the cleverness of our arguments, the attractiveness of our programmes, or the strength of our personalities. It is in the gospel of Jesus Christ, faithfully taught and lived.

Every Christian Must Become A Gospel Worker

One of the greatest obstacles to evangelism today is the assumption that it belongs mainly to preachers, elders, or those who have received specialised training. Certainly, those who preach and teach publicly have an important responsibility. Paul charged Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5). But the New Testament also presents evangelism as a work in which all disciples participated.

Following the persecution in Jerusalem, the scattered believers "went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). These were not merely the apostles; Acts 8:1 distinguishes the apostles from the believers who were scattered. This should challenge every member of the Lord's church. A congregation may have a preacher, a meeting house, a sound programme of worship, and well-organised Bible classes, yet still fall short of its mission if its members are not actively reaching the lost. We must ask ourselves: How many people have heard the gospel because of our personal efforts? How many neighbours, colleagues, classmates, friends, or relatives have we invited to study the Bible? How many conversations about spiritual things have we avoided because we feared rejection or embarrassment? We do not all have the same abilities, opportunities, or circumstances. Nevertheless, every Christian can contribute to the spread of the gospel. Some may teach publicly; others may arrange Bible studies, invite people to worship, distribute biblical literature, encourage new converts, or help remove practical obstacles that prevent others from hearing the truth. Whatever our circumstances, we must not allow evangelism to become somebody else's responsibility.

Turning The World Upside Down Begins With Ourselves

There is an important truth we must not overlook: before we seek to influence the world, we must allow God's word to transform our own lives. Paul urged Christians not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2). We cannot effectively call people to repentance while deliberately accommodating sin in our own lives. We cannot persuasively teach the importance of truth while being dishonest, or speak about Christian



love while treating people with contempt. Jesus declared that His disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16). Our good works should cause others to glorify our Father in heaven. Our conduct does not replace the preaching of the gospel, but it should support and commend the message we proclaim.

Consider the influence of a Christian who remains honest in a dishonest environment, shows kindness to difficult people, forgives those who offend him, keeps his promises, and treats others with dignity. Such a life can create opportunities for meaningful conversations about Christ. However, good behaviour alone does not tell people what they must believe about Jesus or what God requires for salvation. We must be ready to give an answer for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15). Our lives should open doors, and our words should faithfully communicate the gospel. The church's influence becomes most powerful when its members combine biblical teaching with sincere love, holy living, and a genuine concern for the souls of others.

We Must Speak The Truth In Love

If we desire to turn the world upside down, we must be prepared to challenge error. The apostles did not remain silent when confronted with false teaching. Paul reasoned from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 17:2–3). In Ephesus, he reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus, and the word of the Lord spread throughout the region (Acts 19:8–10). Yet boldness must never become an excuse for arrogance, hostility, or personal abuse. We are commanded to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but gentle, patient, and able to teach (2 Timothy 2:24–25). Our aim is not to win arguments at the expense of souls. It is to help people understand and obey the truth of God's word. This requires us to know the Scriptures, listen carefully to people's questions, answer honestly when we do not know something, and patiently encourage further study. We must neither dilute God's word to make it more acceptable nor present it in a manner that needlessly alienates those who need to hear it. The message of the cross may be offensive to some, but the messenger must not become an unnecessary stumbling block through pride or unkindness.

What Must We Do?

If we are serious about reaching our world, our commitment must move beyond good intentions.

We must pray for opportunities. Paul asked the Colossians to pray that God would open a door for the word (Colossians 4:3). We should pray for open hearts, wisdom, courage, and opportunities to teach.

We must prepare ourselves. Peter instructs Christians to be ready to give an answer for their hope (1 Peter 3:15). Regular Bible study equips us to explain the gospel accurately and respond thoughtfully to questions.

We must build relationships. People are not projects or numbers to be added to a congregation's attendance figures. They are souls made in God's image. Genuine friendship, compassion, hospitality, and concern can create opportunities for spiritual conversations. We must be willing to invest time in people, even when their response is slow.

We must teach the whole counsel of God. Our responsibility is not merely to encourage people to become religious. We must teach them to observe all that Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19–20). Like the apostles, we must proclaim God's message faithfully, including the demands of repentance, faith, confession, and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38;



8:35–38; Romans 10:9–10).

We must follow up with those who respond. Evangelism does not end when someone first hears the gospel or obeys it. New Christians need teaching, encouragement, fellowship, and opportunities to grow. The Lord's commission includes teaching disciples to observe His commands (Matthew 28:20).

We must persevere. Not everyone will believe, and not every Bible study will result in conversion. Nevertheless, we must not become discouraged. Paul reminds us that we should not grow weary in doing good (Galatians 6:9). Our responsibility is to sow and water faithfully, recognising that God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6–7).

Can We Do It Again?

Can we turn the world upside down? The question is not whether we can reproduce the exact historical circumstances of the first century. Nor is it whether we can guarantee that every person will accept the gospel. The question is whether we will faithfully proclaim the same unchanging message with the conviction, courage, and commitment demonstrated by the early church. We cannot save souls by our own power, but we can point people to the Saviour. We cannot force people to obey the truth, but we can teach it clearly and lovingly. We cannot control the response of every hearer, but we can ensure that fear, apathy, or complacency does not silence us.

Perhaps the world will not always describe our work as turning it upside down. Some will welcome the gospel; others will oppose it. Our success must not be measured solely by public approval, numerical growth, or immediate conversions. We must measure our faithfulness by whether we are doing what the Lord has commanded. The church needs more than admiration for the courage of the early Christians. It needs to imitate their faithfulness. We need members who see lost souls as people who need Christ, congregations that make evangelism a regular priority, and Christians whose lives reflect the message they proclaim.

Let us therefore return to the Scriptures, renew our commitment to the Great Commission, and take the gospel into our homes, workplaces, schools, neighbourhoods, and communities. The world still needs the transforming power of Jesus Christ. The gospel is still God's power unto salvation. And the Lord still calls His people to carry that message to the lost. **Will we answer the call?**

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QUIBBLES THAT BACKFIRED

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Porter replied that he would baptise the whole person. However, he would not bring back those he had already baptised before the mishap and baptise them again.

In his closing speech, Waters argued that the difference was that, in baptism, the individual was the unit, whereas in the communion service, the congregation was the unit.

Porter considered this another quibble. If the congregation were the unit in the communion service, it would mean that the entire congregation must partake before anyone could be said to have observed the Lord's Supper. Consequently, if one member became sick and had to leave before the communion was served, the others might as well dismiss and go home, since the supposed unit—the entire congregation—had not completed the act.

Institutionalism

The Relationship Between the Individual Christian, Christian Groups and the Church

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Benin City, Nigeria

The New Testament teaches us that the Christian life is both personal and collective. Christians have responsibilities that belong to them individually, and they also have responsibilities as members of a local congregation. At the same time, Christians sometimes act together in ways that do not constitute the establishment of another church or religious organization. Thus, the individual Christian, Christians acting together, and the local church are related, but they are not interchangeable. Understanding this relationship is essential to properly identifying the responsibilities and authority associated with each.

Confusion arises when these distinctions are ignored. A work that God has assigned to the individual may be transferred to the church; something that belongs to the local church may be treated as merely an individual responsibility; or Christians may establish a human organization and assume that because it is composed of Christians, it is therefore authorized to perform the work of the church.

These distinctions are not merely matters of terminology. They concern Bible authority. If we are committed to doing all things according to the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17), then we must carefully determine who is authorized to do what God has commanded. The question is therefore not simply, *"Is this a good work?"* The more important question is, *"Who has God authorized to perform this work?"*

The Individual Christian

The New Testament addresses Christians not only as members of a congregation but also as individuals. Paul wrote: *"For each one shall bear his own load."* (Galatians 6:5). This statement emphasizes individual responsibility. Every Christian has obligations before God that cannot simply be transferred to someone else or to the local congregation. The Christian is individually responsible for maintaining his relationship with God, studying God's word, living a holy life, resisting temptation, praying, teaching others, showing hospitality, and helping those whom he has the ability and opportunity to help.

Paul told the Ephesian Christians: "*Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good,* ***that he may have something to give him who has need.***" (Ephesians 4:28). Notice the progression. The individual is to work. The individual is then to have something with which he can help the needy. This is significant because the existence of a need does not automatically make that need a responsibility of the local church.

The New Testament repeatedly places benevolent responsibilities upon individual Christians. James, for example, describes pure and undefiled religion in terms that include visiting orphans and widows in their trouble (James 1:27). Christians are commanded to do good to others as they have opportunity (Galatians 6:10). This does not mean that the church has no benevolent responsibility. It means that individual benevolence and congregational benevolence are not identical.

One of the clearest passages demonstrating this distinction is 1 Timothy 5:16: *"If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows."* Paul does not say that every widow who needs assistance becomes the church's responsibility. Instead, he places a responsibility upon believing



individuals so that the church may not be unnecessarily burdened and may reserve its resources for those whom Scripture identifies as the church's responsibility. The distinction is unmistakable: the individual can act, and the church can act—but they are not the same actor.

The Local Church

The New Testament also teaches that Christians are to work together as local congregations. The church at Corinth was a recognizable congregation with collective responsibilities. Paul addressed: *"the church of God which is at Corinth"* (1 Corinthians 1:2). Likewise, Paul addressed the saints at Philippi together with their bishops and deacons (Philippians 1:1). The local church therefore is not merely an informal gathering of Christians. It is a divinely established arrangement with members, elders, deacons, collective worship, and collective responsibilities.

The church has work to do. It has the responsibility to preach the gospel. Paul described the church as: *"the pillar and ground of the truth."* (1 Timothy 3:15). The church is also to edify its members. Ephesians 4:11–16 describes the various functions through which the body is built up and grows. And the church has a benevolent responsibility under the circumstances and limitations revealed in the New Testament. Acts 11 provides an important example. When a famine was predicted, the disciples in Antioch determined to send relief to brethren in Judea. The text says: "*Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*" (Acts 11:29–30) The money was sent to the elders. This is consistent with the local church acting collectively through its divinely appointed leadership. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 speaks of "the collection for the saints" and gives instructions to the churches concerning that collection. Thus, Scripture teaches both individual and congregational benevolence. The important thing is to respect the distinction between them.

Christians Acting Together

At this point, someone might ask: "Does this mean Christians can only act either individually or as a local church?" Christians can certainly act together in circumstances that do not constitute the establishment of another church. For example, Christians may travel together. They may study together. They may help someone together. They may visit someone together. They may preach together. They may cooperate in carrying out a personal work. The mere fact that several Christians act together does not automatically make their activity a church activity. This is an important distinction. Suppose five Christians decide to travel to another community to preach the gospel. They have not thereby established another church. They are simply Christians cooperating in a work that Christians are individually authorized to perform. Likewise, if several Christians decide to contribute their personal money to help a needy person, they have not necessarily created a new religious organization. Collective action is not automatically church action. The crucial question is whether the Christians are merely cooperating as individuals or whether they have established an organization that functions as a religious body separate from the local church.

When Does a Group Become a Church?

This question deserves particular attention. If ten Christians gather together to study the Bible, have they established a new church? Not necessarily. If



twenty Christians travel together to conduct a gospel meeting, have they established a church? Not necessarily. If several Christians pool their personal resources to assist someone, have they established a church? No. A group of Christians does not become a local church merely because its members are Christians. The New Testament gives us a recognizable arrangement for the local church. A congregation consists of Christians who have come together as a local body and function collectively according to the organization and authority revealed in Scripture. This is why we must distinguish between Christians cooperating and Christians creating another religious organization.

The Individual Is Not the Church

One of the dangers in this discussion is treating the individual Christian and the church as though they are interchangeable. They are not. Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 5:16 is especially significant: "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened..." If the individual Christian and the church were simply different names for the same entity, Paul's distinction would make little sense. The individual has one responsibility. The church has another. The individual may relieve someone so that the church will not be burdened. The passage therefore provides an important principle: Not every responsibility placed upon Christians generally is automatically a responsibility of the local church. This principle is broader than benevolence.

Christians are commanded to:

- pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17);
- teach others (Matthew 28:19–20);
- visit those in distress (James 1:27);
- practice hospitality (1 Peter 4:9);
- bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2);
- restore those who have wandered (Galatians 6:1);
- help others as opportunity arises (Galatians 6:10).

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that every individual responsibility must therefore be funded and performed collectively by the local church.

The Difference Between Cooperation and Human Organization

This distinction becomes especially important when considering human organizations. There is nothing inherently wrong with Christians cooperating. The New Testament itself contains examples of Christians cooperating in accomplishing God's purposes. But cooperation does not require the creation of another institution. There is a significant difference between: "Several Christians are cooperating to accomplish a work." and: "Several Christians have established an organization with its own treasury, officers, membership, and ongoing institutional structure to perform religious work." The second situation requires much more careful examination. Why? Because God has already provided an organization for collective congregational work: the local church. The church has elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28), deacons (Philippians 1:1), members, a treasury, worship, and a divinely assigned work. Therefore, when someone proposes another organization to perform what belongs to the church, the question cannot simply be: "Is the organization doing something good?" It must be: "Has God authorized the church to create and support such an organization as an instrument through which it performs its work?" That is the proper question of biblical authority.



A Good Work Is Not Automatically a Work of the Church

This principle is fundamental. There are many things that are good which the New Testament does not assign to the local church. For example, it is good to educate people. It is good to provide recreation. It is good to operate hospitals. It is good to provide employment. It is good to support many worthy social causes. But the goodness of an activity does not, by itself, establish the church's obligation or authority to finance that activity. Otherwise, there would be virtually no limit to what could be charged to the church treasury. The question must always return to Scripture: What has God authorized the church to do? This is the same principle expressed in Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." To do something in the name of Christ means to do it by His authority. Therefore, sincerity and usefulness are not substitutes for divine authority.

What About Christian Groups?

We should also be careful not to use the expression "Christian group" in such a way that it becomes confused with the church. There may be many legitimate arrangements among Christians that are not churches.

For example:

- a group of Christians may travel together;
- Christians may form a temporary team for a particular task;
- several Christians may pool personal resources for a benevolent purpose;
- Christians may cooperate in teaching others;
- Christians may work together on a personal evangelistic effort.

The existence of such cooperation does not necessarily violate God's arrangement for the church. But the moment Christians create a permanent religious organization that collects funds, has its own governing structure, assumes a continuing religious mission, and operates alongside local congregations, we must ask whether that arrangement has divine authority. This is where the distinction between cooperation and institutionalization becomes essential.

There is another danger that deserves equal attention. Some may attempt to make the church responsible for virtually every good work that Christians are individually commanded to perform. But this can actually weaken individual Christianity. If the church is expected to provide everything the individual Christian is commanded to provide, the individual may become passive. Consider Ephesians 4:28 again. The Christian is to work so that he may have something to give to the needy. That command cannot be fulfilled by simply saying: "The church will take care of it." Likewise, when Jesus taught the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), He emphasized personal compassion and personal action. Christianity is not designed to make the individual dependent upon the local church for every opportunity to do good. The church has its work. The individual has his work. Both are important.

The opposite error is equally dangerous. Someone may say: "Since I am a Christian and I can preach, I don't need the church." But the New Testament clearly teaches Christians to function as members of the body. Paul wrote: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function..." Romans 12:4 And concerning the church: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." 1 Corinthians 12:27. God did not



design Christians to exist in complete isolation from one another. The individual Christian needs the fellowship, encouragement, teaching, correction, and collective worship of the local church. Therefore, recognizing individual responsibility should never be used as an excuse for abandoning congregational responsibility.

The Beauty of God's Arrangement

When properly understood, the distinction between the individual Christian, Christian cooperation, and the local church is not restrictive for the sake of being restrictive. It is actually a reflection of the wisdom of God. The individual Christian has opportunities to serve that no congregation can completely assume. The local church has collective responsibilities that no individual Christian can fulfill on behalf of the congregation. And Christians can cooperate in many lawful activities without creating another religious institution. God has provided an arrangement in which: the individual serves, the congregation works, and Christians cooperate without confusing their respective roles. Our responsibility is not to improve upon God's arrangement but to respect it.

Conclusion

The individual Christian, Christian groups, and the local church are related, but they are not interchangeable. The individual Christian is a member of the local church and therefore has responsibilities both as an individual and as a member of the body (1 Corinthians 12:27). Christians may also associate and cooperate with one another in various lawful activities without every such association constituting a local church. The local church, however, is a divinely established collective body with its own organization, treasury, and responsibilities. Thus, while individual Christians make up the church, the individual Christian is not the church in his individual capacity; and while Christians may cooperate in groups, every group of Christians is not a church. Recognizing these distinctions allows us to understand what God has assigned to the individual, what He has assigned to the local church, and what Christians may legitimately accomplish through voluntary cooperation.

SEEK GOD'S APPROVAL

Even though Jesus "performed...many signs," many were simply "not believing in Him" (John 12:37). Jesus pointed out that this fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy about those who were blind and hard-hearted and would not be converted (John 12:40).

However, there were some who believed. In fact, John noted that "many...of the rulers believed in Him" (John 12:42). This would be commendable if not for what was said next: "But because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (John 12:42-43).

Recognizing the facts about Jesus and acknowledging His identity is one thing. However, even the demons did this (cf. James 2:19). Yet it takes much more courage to confess one's belief openly. The rulers were not willing to do this because they valued the approval of men more than the approval of God. Because of this, their belief in Christ would do them no good. Jesus said elsewhere, "Whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

So seek God's approval. Only He can provide us with the hope of eternal life. If we abandon Him to win the approval of those in the world, we will suffer the same fate as them.

Andy Sochor

Myth Buster

Did Jesus Hate the Poor?

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

A sermon clip from Pastor David Ibiyeomie of Salvation Ministries, Port Harcourt, has been doing the rounds on social media. In it, he tells his congregation that "Jesus never visited any poor person in his house," and concludes that Jesus "hates people who are poor." He then adds: "There's nothing wrong with you coming to Christ as a poor man, but it's wrong for you to remain poor. It is wrong."

Many cheered. Many more were troubled, and rightly so. This is the prosperity gospel in its plainest form: the belief that God wants every faithful Christian to be rich, and that poverty is a sign of weak faith or sin. It is preached from many pulpits, and it sounds attractive in a hard economy. But is it what the Bible teaches? Let us open the Book and check.

Claim 1: "Jesus never entered a poor man's house"

Start with Jesus Himself. He was born in a borrowed manger. When Mary and Joseph presented Him at the temple, they offered two birds (Luke 2:24), the offering the Law allowed for a family too poor to afford a lamb (Leviticus 12:8). As an adult He said, "The foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). His ministry was supported by women who gave from their own means (Luke 8:1–3). Jesus did not need to visit a poor man's house. For most of His life, He lived in one.

Now look at the homes He did enter. He went into the house of Simon Peter, a working fisherman, and healed his mother-in-law (Mark 1:29–31). He ate in the house of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3), a man whose disease would have made him an outcast. The family at Bethany gave Him a meal, but hospitality was expected of every household, rich or poor. A plate of food is not proof of wealth.

The pastor also pointed to Zacchaeus, who was rich. But read how that story ends. Jesus came to call Zacchaeus to repentance, and the fruit of his repentance was this: "the half of my goods I give to the poor" (Luke 19:8). The visit was not a reward for wealth. It was a rescue from it.

Above all, Jesus announced the purpose of His ministry in His home synagogue: "He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). When John the Baptist asked whether He was the Christ, Jesus pointed to the evidence, including that "the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Luke 7:22). A Saviour who hated the poor would have chosen a very strange mission statement.

Claim 2: "It is wrong to remain poor"

If remaining poor after conversion were sin, the Bible would be full of sinners we are taught to admire.

· Jesus said, "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20).

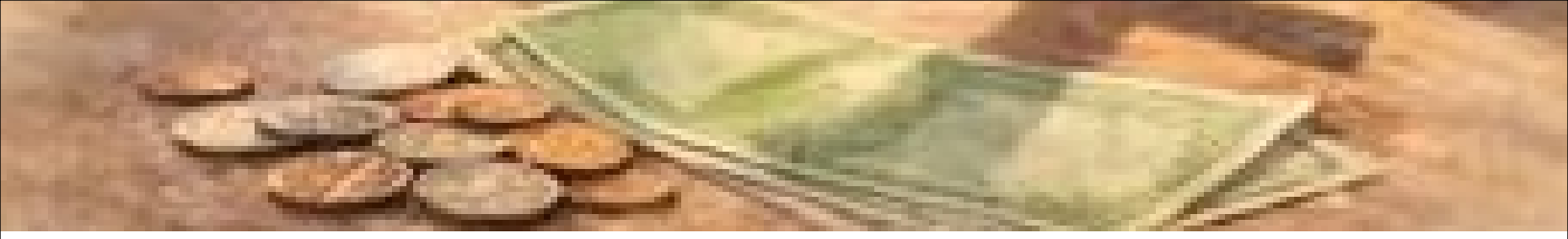
· He praised the widow who gave her last two coins above all the rich donors in the temple (Mark 12:41–44).

· James wrote, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?" (James 2:5).

· Peter told a lame man, "Silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6). Was the apostle living in sin?

· Paul went hungry, thirsty, cold and poorly clothed in the service of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:27), and learned to be content whether he had plenty or little (Philippians 4:11–13).

· The Macedonian churches gave generously "in a great



trial of affliction" and "deep poverty" (2 Corinthians 8:2). Paul held them up as an example, not a warning.

Jesus' own letters to the churches settle the matter. To Smyrna He said, "I know thy... poverty, (but thou art rich)" (Revelation 2:9). To wealthy Laodicea He said, "thou sayest, I am rich... and knowest not that thou art... poor" (Revelation 3:17). Heaven measures riches very differently from the bank.

The favourite proof texts

2 Corinthians 8:9 says Christ "became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Prosperity preachers read this as a promise of money. But the whole chapter is about a collection for poor Christians in Jerusalem. Paul uses Christ's self-giving to urge believers who have more to share with those who have less, "that there may be equality" (8:13–15). The riches in view are the riches of grace, and the application is generosity, not personal gain.

3 John 2 ("that thou mayest prosper and be in health") is a standard first-century letter greeting, much like our "I hope this finds you well." It is a kind wish for a friend, not a covenant promise that every believer will be wealthy.

What the Bible really teaches

Busting this myth does not mean poverty is holy. Scripture commends hard work (Proverbs 10:4; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; Ephesians 4:28), and it never condemns wealth itself. Abraham, Job and Joseph of Arimathea were rich and faithful. Paul did not tell wealthy Christians to give everything away. He told them not to be proud, not to trust in riches, and to be "rich in good works" (1 Timothy 6:17–19).

What the Bible does condemn is turning religion into a business. Paul warned against men "supposing that gain is godliness," and added, "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare" (1 Timothy 6:5, 9). Jesus said plainly, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

Why this matters

The prosperity gospel does real harm. It tells the struggling widow, the unemployed graduate and the sick brother that their hardship is a spiritual failure. It turns giving into a transaction, where offerings become "seeds" sown to get more back. And it shifts our eyes from the cross to the car park.

The church Jesus built was known for the opposite. The early Christians shared so that no one among them lacked (Acts 4:34). The apostles' one request of Paul was to "remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10). True religion, James says, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction (James 1:27). We are not called to shame the poor. We are called to serve them.

Conclusion

Jesus did not hate the poor. He was poor. He lived among the poor, preached to the poor, blessed the poor and commanded His people to care for the poor. Material wealth is neither a sign of God's favour nor poverty a sign of His anger. The greatest riches anyone can have are found in Christ, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3), and those riches are offered freely to rich and poor alike.

Before we believe any preacher, let us do what the Bereans did and search the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so (Acts 17:11).

IDEAL HOME

The Biblical Concept of Hospitality: A Sacred Call to Love and Welcome the Stranger

By Rowland Femi Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33–34).

Introduction

Fear of the unknown is a primary driver of excluding strangers, and it is no longer a distant problem. It is a direct test of who belongs, who is welcome, and who is allowed to be seen as fully human. On my continent, that test is visible in South Africa, where foreign nationals have been beaten, burned out of their homes, and hunted by mobs convinced that a stranger threatens their survival. In North America, where I live, that same test is visible across the United States, where migrants fleeing violence or poverty are met with detention centers, razor-wire barriers, and political rhetoric that reduces human beings to statistics or threats.

This article argues that hospitality is a fundamental act of resistance to fear, nationalism, and the erosion of our moral imagination toward the stranger. While the legal complexities of immigration merit their own discussion, my focus here is on the vulnerable, those fleeing violence and dehumanization in search of safety and dignity.

It is precisely into this fractured landscape that the biblical vision of hospitality speaks, not as a naive ideal but as a countercultural and costly call, one that falls especially on those called to be light in a darkening world (Matthew 5:14–16). It is far more than social etiquette or merely hosting familiar faces. It is a spiritual discipline rooted in God's very character. As Luke 14:12–14 reminds us, true hospitality is not about reciprocity, inviting those who can invite us back; instead, it is about opening our hearts and homes to those who cannot repay us, such as the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. Here, the blessing transcends all social standing.

Defining Biblical Hospitality

To understand what biblical hospitality demands, we must return to its roots. The Hebrew *hachnasat orchim* ("bringing in guests") and the Greek *philoxenia* (combining *philos* [love/friendship] and *xenos* [stranger]) together mean friendship toward the stranger. A welcome, however, is more than a greeting or a smile; it is an act of opening oneself, one's space, and one's life to another person. Beneath the surface lies the message: "You belong here." To welcome someone is to see them, acknowledging their dignity, humanity, and worth.

Biblical hospitality, therefore, is far more than social etiquette. It is the intentional, sacrificial, and grace-filled practice of welcoming the stranger, the outsider, and the marginalized into one's space, community, and care. It reflects God's character and covenant love.

The Old Testament Examples

From creation, God Himself is the original host, the One who fashioned a garden, placed humanity within it, and abundantly provided for every need (Genesis 1–2). He desires that humanity dwell and flourish in the beauty of His holiness and splendor, for they are made in the *Imago Dei* (the image of God) to reflect His generous and welcoming character (Genesis 1:26–27). Abraham vividly models this divine character in his encounter with three visitors in



Genesis 18:1–8. He ran to meet them and offered water, rest, and a lavish feast. The writer of Hebrews later notes that "some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

The sin of Sodom (cf. Genesis 19) is often reduced to sexual perversion alone. While sexual sin was present, Ezekiel makes clear that Sodom's failure was equally a total collapse of hospitality, marked by pride, gluttony, and neglect of the poor and needy (Ezekiel 16:49). In contrast, Rebekah's willingness to water a stranger's camels signaled her worthiness as a covenant partner in marriage (Genesis 24:17–27), and Job could say, "The stranger did not lodge in the street because he opened his doors to the traveler" (Job 31:32).

The Torah mandates hospitality toward strangers because God forged Israel's identity through its experience as strangers, making love of the stranger a central moral demand of Israelite life. Exodus 22:21 makes this clear: *"You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."* This principle is woven into Israelite society through the gleaning laws (Leviticus 19:9–10), the cities of refuge (Numbers 35:9–34), and the Sabbath rest (Deuteronomy 5:14), all of which embody God's love and justice toward strangers.

Deuteronomy 10:17–19 reads:

> *For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore, love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

When Israel strayed from these commandments, God sent His prophets to rebuke them. Isaiah links true fasting to "sharing one's food with the hungry and providing the poor wanderer with shelter" (see Isaiah 58:7). Zechariah extends this call, urging Israel to "execute true justice, show mercy and compassion [...] do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor" (Zechariah 7:9–10). The story of Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 1–4) powerfully embodies this biblical ethics, as Boaz extends *hesed* (lovingkindness) to Ruth, a Moabite foreigner, and through that act of grace, she enters the Messianic lineage.

The New Testament Examples

In the New Testament, Jesus does not merely teach hospitality; he embodies it. His welcome is embodied, disruptive, and radically inclusive, thereby revealing hospitality as a deliberate act of grace. Jesus redefined hospitality by drawing near to those society dismissed as unworthy, not merely offering kindness to the familiar but extending dignity to the stigmatized and the socially abandoned. He ate with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:10–13), welcomed children even when His disciples tried to turn them away (Mark 10:13–16), and engaged with a Samaritan woman whose ethnicity and reputation made her a social outcast (John 4:1–42). Most strikingly, He invited Himself into Zacchaeus's home, a man despised for his corruption (Luke 19:1–10). His critics sneered, calling Him a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 11:19), unaware that their insult perfectly captured the heart of His mission.

The New Testament pushes this vision of hospitality even further, to what can only be called the Great Reversal. In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus delivers a startling truth that dismantles every social boundary by revealing that how we treat the least of people is how we treat Him. When He says, “I was a stranger,



and you invited me in," He identifies Himself with the vulnerable, the displaced, and the forgotten. Hospitality toward the marginalized becomes, in reality, hospitality toward Christ Himself. Welcome is no longer an optional virtue. It becomes a direct encounter with the presence of Jesus, hidden among those the world most eagerly ignores.

The early church took Jesus' teaching with full seriousness by embodying a community that defied the social divisions of its time. Their practice of *koinonia* (fellowship) was not sentimental togetherness. Rather, it was a radical sharing of life across ethnic, economic, and cultural boundaries (Acts 2:44–47). The New Testament epistles echo this call by urging believers to "pursue hospitality" (Romans 12:13) and to do so "without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9).

Paul further grounds this boundary-breaking fellowship in the cross. He notes that in Christ, the "dividing wall" has been torn down (Ephesians 2:14), creating a community where old hierarchies lose their power. The church is therefore called to be a "new humanity," a people in whom there is "neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). We transcend these boundaries not because they cease to exist socially, but because, in Christ, they no longer define us. We welcome others because we ourselves are "strangers and exiles" in this world, pilgrims looking toward a better home (Philippians 3:20-21; cf. 1 Peter 2:9–12). Hospitality should therefore be the natural posture of those who know they live by grace.

Conclusion

Biblical hospitality ultimately points beyond the present moment to a future when welcome is perfected. The story that began in the Garden of Eden will one day culminate at a table, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6–9). There, the redeemed will gather for a great, inclusive feast drawn from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9). John's vision is not merely poetic. Rather, it is the final picture of God's Kingdom, a community in which every barrier of nationality, ethnicity, status, and origin is forever dissolved in Christ's presence.

Every act of hospitality we offer today rehearses the coming feast. Every meal shared with a stranger, every door opened to the needy, and every gesture of kindness toward the marginalized, no matter how small, is a meaningful participation in God's kingdom. These acts are not merely symbolic. Rather, they are a way of life that reflects Christlike love, tangibly expressing God's character and pointing to the attributes of the Kingdom. They declare that the world as it is, marked by fear, exclusion, and hostility, is not the world God intends. And so the question remains for us all: in a world filled with strangers, will we be the ones who offer welcome?

EDITOR'S PREACHING VISIT TO THE PHILIPPINES

In September 2026, the Editor of Unmasking Sophistry Magazine, Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba, travelled to the Philippines for a preaching mission alongside Chris Reeves from Tennessee, USA. The visit provided an opportunity to preach the gospel, encourage brethren, and participate in efforts to spread the truth of God's word. A full report of the preaching trip, including highlights of the activities and experiences, can be read on our website via the link below:

https://www.unmaskingsophistry.com/2026/10/16/my-preaching-work-in-the-philippines-in-2026/



Salvation

The "We-All-Sin" Approach

By Terry Wane Benton

In the "we-all-sin" approach to grace, the attitude is that since we all sin, none of us can exclude another sinner from fellowship. But even a casual glance at I Corinthians 5 shows this is not the right approach. Paul, even though he could not claim sinless perfection, said that they should have taken firm measures to deal with the man involved in sexual immorality. He knew more about grace than any of us, knew he was not perfect, and yet he knew enough about sin and the proper relationship to grace to know that God would not automatically cover a man who was not repenting of sin, yet claimed to believe in Jesus and trust in His grace.

Peter, another man who did not claim sinless perfection, still held Simon to a standard that said that Simon's heart was not right because he thought the gift of God could be purchased with money. He wanted the same power the apostles had to lay hands on and impart the Spirit's miraculous power to others. This matter was reserved for the apostles, and he had no part in it (See Acts 8:13f). But since "we all sin," why would Peter single out Simon and tell him he needed to repent? Was Peter being unfair and judgmental? Or is there something wrong with the "we-all-sin" approach?

Paul confronted Peter when Peter acted hypocritically in associating with Jews and Gentiles, showing favoritism in his behavior (See Galatians 2). This would have been a good time for Paul to demonstrate the validity of the "we-all-sin" approach. The fact that he never took that approach should tell us that the approach is not valid.

Some think the "*he that is without sin, let him cast the first stone*" applies to all cases, but that would immediately cancel out the instructions in I Corinthians 5. What Jesus was referring to was not that no sin should ever be disciplined by other people who also sin from time to time, but that the law of Moses did not allow the death penalty for adultery to be applied without bringing both the man and the woman and without having two or more witnesses. The witnesses were to be willing to cast the first stone; else they would be subject to the death penalty of stoning if they were false witnesses.

Jesus was not saying stoning should never occur since all sinned in some way; who would administer it? Jesus was saying the witnesses should apply the law correctly, because it would backfire on them. Were they aware of this woman's sin because they had spent time with her too and knew just where to find her when they had their minds set on trapping Jesus instead of administering justice under the law? Jesus' words in the case were not designed to make the Spirit-guided words of I Corinthians 5 and II Thessalonians 3 never be practiced.

There is something to be said for the faith that is in Christ, that has a penitent heart, that is always working on the heart to overcome the practice of any sin and will not excuse it but will work with the Spirit to overcome it, versus a brother who openly sins and is not penitent about it. Perhaps he tries to justify his sin by claiming that "all sin," and that he plans to keep his choice of sin as long as others have any sin in their lives. One man is confessing his sins and is determined to use the tools of God to work on overcoming it. He appeals to God's mercy and grace, confessing his sin, and determining to be washed in the blood to sin this way no more. He walks in the Spirit, strengthening his faith and determination to "go and sin no more". This man goes away from the throne of grace justified and



renewed in his determination to work against the sin that so easily besets him.

The second man has resigned himself to sin and plans to sin, thinking grace will automatically cover him. But Scripture warns against "*continuing in sin that grace may abound*" (Romans 6:1f) and against "*turning the grace of God into license*" (Jude 4-5). The second man has misused the grace of God not only to deceive himself, but to resign himself to continuing in sin and to extending fellowship to others who plan to continue in sin.

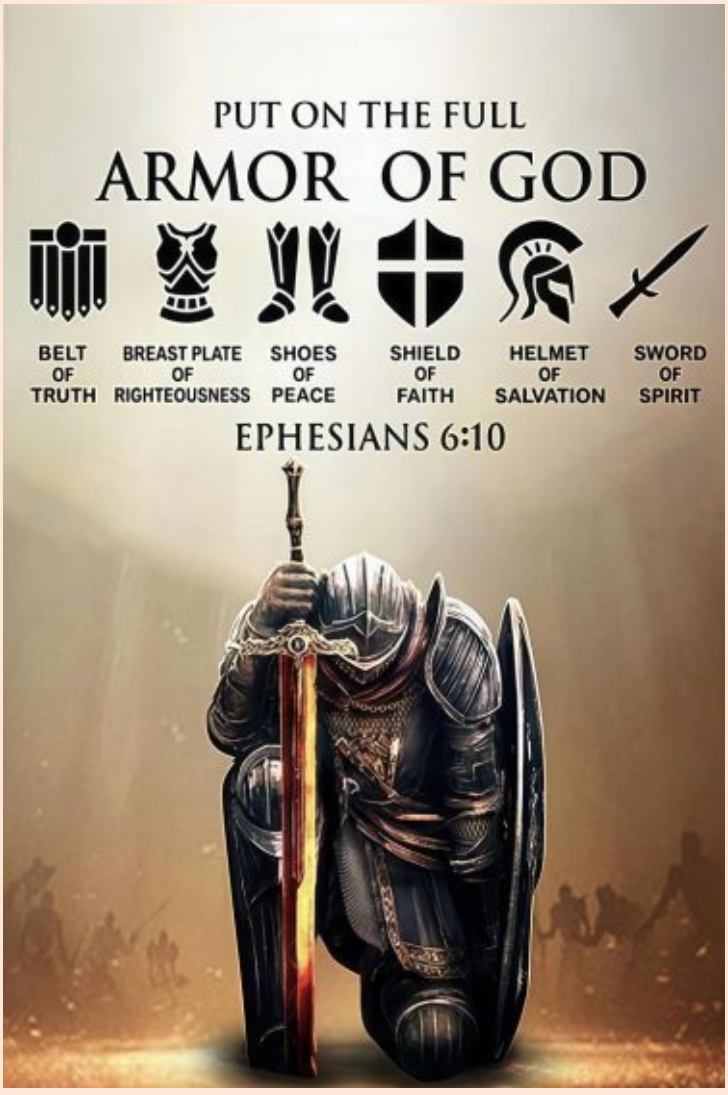
He takes a path that neither Paul nor Peter took. The second man would disobey the instructions to withdraw from a brother who continues in sin (I Corinthians 5), because he has resigned himself to the "we-all-sin" approach. He thinks Paul was wrong and lacked the Spirit's guidance when he gave such instructions. He is now on a path that resents anyone who would withhold or withdraw fellowship from practicing thieves, adulterers, homosexuals, and murderers.

He reasons that "sin is sin" and "we all sin." So, fellowship should be wide open to all sinners. He would think Paul is the worst sinner of all for giving such instructions, and he will not fellowship Paul or those who hold the same position as Paul. This is an impossible position because if his fellowship were open to all sinners, he should never object to the kind of sinner Paul was in giving instructions for limited fellowship. The "we-all-sin" approach is simply not the position Paul and Peter held regarding fellowship. Instructions about limited fellowship show that the "we-all-sin" approach is not true to God's word and actually aids and abets sin. Paul said a person must not deceive himself into thinking he can practice sin and still go to heaven.

"*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*" (I Corinthians6:9-11 NKJV).

The second man has simply deceived himself.

ARMOR OF GOD



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How do I answer the claim that the Scriptures have some truth but can't be infallible because men were involved in its writing?

By Jeffery Hamilton | Nebraska, USA

Question

I was talking about the inspiration of Scripture with a friend. He claimed that the Scriptures had some truth and were inspired by God, but were not infallible because men had to have messed it up in our fallibility. He also said that there was no way God forced men to have written the Bible properly according to His exact instructions because God never takes away our free will. My friend is not a Christian, which makes it hard to find a standard from which to debate this, do you have any suggestions?

Answer

Though your friend is not a Christian, he is discussing the Bible and its origins. What he is saying is that God is not able to accurately deliver His own message to mankind.

The core is the claim that since God gave people free will, they cannot be forced to relay a message from God just as He wanted. The story of Balaam contradicts his position. When Balak approached Balaam a second time asking for a curse on the Israelites, Balaam rightly responded: "*Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more*" (Numbers 22:18). When Balaam went anyway with Balak's people, God warned Balaam: "*Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak*" (Numbers 22:35). Balaam tried numerous times to curse the Israelites through inspiration but failed. Thus, this proves that God can and does control the words spoken on His behalf. And yet it did not take away Balaam's free will because before departing Balaam told Balak how to get the Israelites to sin so that God would be angry with them.

Paul stated, "*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual*" (I Corinthians 2:12-13). When speaking God's words, it is God who selects the word choice, not man. It isn't part and part because "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (II Timothy 3:16-17). The phrase "inspiration of God" literally means breathed from the mouth of God. The claim of the Bible is that it is God's words. That is why it is claimed, "*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth*" (John 17:17).

Your friend says the claims of the Bible to be inspired by God, being the very words of God, are false. Therefore, it is up to him to prove his point; surely he isn't making baseless claims, is he? Why should any accept a person's opinion over a document that has thousands of years of history withstanding criticism? Since he is claiming that the Bible has some truth, how does he determine which parts are true and which are false without resorting to personal opinion?

Christians and Ceremonies: Rooted and Built Up in Christ

By Emmanuel Olusegun Alonge | Ibadan, Nigeria

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 2:6-7).

In a world where ceremonies have become increasingly centred on entertainment, fashion, social status, and worldly pleasure, Christians must pause and ask an important question: How should a child of God conduct self in social ceremonies?

This question becomes even more important when viewed through the lens of our theme, "Rooted and Built Up in Christ." A Christian whose life is rooted in Christ draws his strength, guidance, and character from the Lord rather than from society. Like a tree planted by rivers of water (Psalm 1:3), he remains stable and fruitful. Likewise, being built up in Christ speaks of continual spiritual growth, maturity, and faithfulness. Such a Christian does not separate his faith from any area of life. Christ remains Lord in worship, at home, at work, and even in celebrations.

Christianity is not merely a matter of baptism or church attendance. A Christian is a saved follower of Christ who continues to live under His lordship. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26), and Peter wrote, "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Peter 4:16). If Christ is truly Lord of our lives, then He must also be Lord of our ceremonies.

Ceremonies in the Light of Scripture

A ceremony is an organised observance marking an important occasion. Weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies, graduations, anniversaries, dedications, freedom ceremony and similar events are all examples. The Bible records several occasions that may properly be described as ceremonies. There were wedding celebrations (John 2:1-11; Matthew 22:1-2), marriage feasts (Genesis 29:22), funeral gatherings (John 11:17-36; Acts 8:2), family celebrations (Luke 15:22-24), and community banquets (Luke 14:12-14) etc. Therefore, ceremonies themselves are not sinful. What matters is whether they honour God or dishonour Him. The apostle Paul established the governing principle when he penned, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Notice that Paul did not limit God's authority to worship assemblies. He said, **"whatever you do."** That includes ceremonies.

What Makes a Ceremony Acceptable Before God?

Not every ceremony is acceptable in God's sight. Scripture provides clear principles by which all ceremonies should be evaluated. First, they must be conducted decently and orderly. The Bible instructs, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). Second, they must glorify God. "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Third, they must be void of worldliness. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Fourth, they should promote love, fellowship, and good influence. As we are instructed, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). Whenever a ceremony encourages obedience to God, promotes purity, and strengthens Christian influence, it falls within the bounds of Scriptural liberty if one takes part in it.

Some Ceremonies Christians Must Reject

The Bible is very clear about the kind of ceremonies



Christians must avoid. God commanded: "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them..." These are the First Commandments and forms the foundation of God's teaching against idolatry (Ex. 20:3–5 cf. Deut. 6:14–15; Deut. 27:15). One of the clearest commands for Christians to completely avoid idolatry. "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons..." (1 Cor. 10:14, 20–21cf. 1 John 5:21; Acts 17:29–30; Eph. 5:5. Therefore, Christians must refuse to conduct or attend ceremonies involving idolatry, traditional religious worship, ancestor veneration, invocation of spirits, occult practices, fetish rituals, and secret societies. The Lord warned, "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer... For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord" (Deut. 18:10-12).

Likewise, ceremonies characterised by drunkenness, sensuality, and immoral entertainment cannot be justified. Apostle Paul by divine inspiration wrote "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Peter reminded Christians that they had spent enough of their former lives in, "Drunkenness, lusts, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries" (1 Peter 4:3). When a child of God reads passages like Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Isa. 5:11-12, 22; Habb.2:15; Prov. 31:4-5; Gal. 5:19-21;Rom. 13:13 and also remember Noah in Gen. 9:20-24; Lot Gen. 19:30-38; Nabal 1Sam. 25:36-38; Belshazzar Dan. 5:1-6; 22-30; and others like them, he/ she will know why it is necessary to avoid what social intake of alcohol can cause. No amount of social acceptance can make sinful practices acceptable before God.

How Can I Represent Christ in My Ceremony?

Every Christian ceremony should answer one question, which is, **How will Christ be honoured through this event?** We are ambassadors of Christ. "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador represents his nation wherever he goes. Likewise, a Christian represents Christ everywhere he goes. Therefore a Christian his/ her ceremony must

1. Represent Christ Through Godly Dressing

Modern society often promotes immodesty, vanity, and sensuality. Unfortunately, many ceremonies have become occasions where indecent dressing is celebrated rather than condemned. Short skirts and gowns; dresses that expose the thighs; "Mini" styles that provide little coverage; very tight clothing; bodycon dresses; skin-tight trousers, leggings, or tops that clearly reveal body shape and intimate contours; clothing that exposes stomach, waist, navel, or lower back; dresses exposing most or all of the back; off-shoulder or barely-covered designs revealing cuts that make the outfit sensual; all garments promoting immorality, vulgarity, drunkenness, violence, or ungodly lifestyles will not glorify God. Yet God's standard has not changed. "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation" (1 Tim. 2:9). As Christians, the goal is not simply to avoid nakedness but to cultivate a spirit of holiness, modesty, and reverence for God in both appearance and conduct (1 Pet. 1:15-16; Col. 3:17). Peter emphasised that true beauty comes from within, "Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4). The purpose of



clothing in Scripture was never merely decoration. After sin entered the world, God Himself clothed Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21), demonstrating concern for modesty and covering. Christians should therefore reject styles designed to expose the body, provoke lust, attract sensual attention, or glorify vanity. The question is not, "What is fashionable?" but, "Does this honour God?"

2. Represent Christ Through What You Serve

One of the greatest challenges in modern ceremonies is the widespread expectation of alcohol.

While many defend alcoholic drinks as harmless social customs, Christians must evaluate the matter through Scripture. The Bible repeatedly warns against alcohol's destructive influence.

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Pro. 20:1). "And do not be drunk with wine" (Eph. 5:18). For emphasis, If a Christian knowingly provides what may encourage drunkenness, disorder, quarrels, and sinful behaviour, can he honestly say he is promoting godliness? Godly ceremonies should promote sobriety, self-control, hospitality, and spiritual influence. Water, fruit juices, soft drinks, malt drinks, smoothies, tea, and other wholesome beverages can refresh guests without creating opportunities for sin.

Christian love asks not merely, "Can I?" but, "Should I?" What glory will it give to God.

3. Represent Christ Through Music

Music shapes atmosphere and influences hearts. Paul instructed Christians:

"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). Likewise, in Colossians 3:16 we read "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." What a perfect prescription of music for faithful children of God? Music selected for Christian ceremonies should be evaluated by its message, influence, and effect upon listeners. Does it encourage purity? Does it honour God? Does it strengthen faith?

Many of the popular songs at ceremonies nowadays glorify immorality, materialism, pride, violence, lust, or worldly pleasure rather than the Almighty God. Such music cannot be reconciled with God's command that "Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure... meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

Our music in our ceremonies should elevate minds toward God, not drag hearts toward sin.

4. Represent Christ Through Conduct and Dancing

The Bible recognises legitimate expressions of joy. "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Eccl. 3:4). However, Scripture consistently condemns sensuality and lustful behaviour. Christians are commanded, "Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). The issue is not merely movement but influence. Does the conduct promote holiness? Does it provoke lust? Does it weaken Christian influence? Every Christian must remember that you must "Be holy in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15). No ceremony should become an occasion for behaviour that dishonours God.

The Critical Role of Parents

Parents are not merely financial sponsors of ceremonies; they are spiritual guardians. Scriptures commands, "Train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6).

Again, parents are instructed to "Bring them



(children) up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) (emphasis mine). Parents therefore have a God-given responsibility to guide decisions regarding dressing, music, entertainment, conduct, and overall atmosphere. Most parents think they have responsibilities to their children at the tender age. When they are grown, they assume they should be left to themselves. When children are taking crucial life decisions like marriage, choice of profession etc. the parents input cannot be overemphasized.

At the wedding in Cana, Mary gave a timeless instruction, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). That remains the safest rule for every Christian family. Note that Mary's influence as a mother is significant. The people saw the mother as the key to reach Jesus.

Parents must resist pressure from relatives, friends, event planners, and worldly trends when those pressures conflict with God's will. A successful ceremony is not measured by applause, glamour, popularity, or social media attention. It is measured by whether God is honoured. This should be Christian parents goal.

Does My Ceremony Concern the Church?

Many people view weddings, birthdays, naming ceremonies, funerals, and other social gatherings as purely personal matters. While such events are not acts of congregational worship, the conduct of a Christian at any ceremony is never outside the concern of God and His church. The church is made up of Christians, and Christians represent Christ everywhere they go. The Bible says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). Again, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). If even ordinary eating and drinking must glorify God, then our ceremonies must also honour Him.

A Christian does not stop being a disciple when he leaves the church building. Jesus commanded, "Let your light so shine before men" (Matt. 5:16). In fact, many people observe our Christianity more closely at social events than during worship services. Our conduct either strengthens or weakens our influence for Christ and His church during ceremonies.

For this reason, the church has a legitimate interest in the moral and spiritual conduct of its members at all time. Paul wrote, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). When a ceremony is characterised by drunkenness, indecency, immoral entertainment, vulgar speech, or other sinful practices, it brings reproach upon the name of Christ and damages Christian influence. The church must not keep quiet.

Some argue, "It is my ceremony; I can do whatever I like." However, Christian liberty is not unlimited. Scripture teaches that we must not place a stumbling block before others (Rom.14:13) and must be careful that our liberty does not become a cause of spiritual harm (1 Cor. 8:9).

We understand that the church must respect matters of personal judgment. The Bible does not legislate the colour of decorations, the menu, the size of the venue, or whether a ceremony is simple or elaborate. These are matters of individual choice and financial capability. What matters is whether the event glorifies God and remains consistent with His will.

Therefore, the real question is not, "Is it my ceremony?" but rather, "Does this honour Christ?" A ceremony may be social in nature, but a Christian is never merely a social person. He is always a follower of



Christ. Since all things are open before the Lord (Heb. 4:13), every Christian should strive to conduct every ceremony in a manner that reflects holiness, wisdom, and devotion to God. The way we conduct our ceremonies concerns the church because it concerns Christ.

A Four-Fold Test for Every Ceremony

Before approving any activity connected with a ceremony, every Christian should ask: Is it Scriptural? (2 Tim. 3:16-17); Does it glorify God? (1 Cor. 10:31); Does it edify others? (1 Cor. 10:23-24) and would I be comfortable doing it if Christ returned at that moment? (1 John 2:28)

These questions expose many practices that have become socially acceptable but remain spiritually dangerous.

Conclusion

A Christian ceremony is far more than a social gathering. It is an opportunity to display the lordship of Christ. Our dressing should reflect modesty. Our entertainment should reflect holiness. Our music should promote edification. Our conduct should display purity. Our choices concerning food and drink should encourage sobriety and self-control. A Christian who is rooted and built up in Christ refuses to separate his faith from his celebrations. Whether planning a wedding, naming ceremony, birthday, graduation, funeral or any other event, he remembers that Christ is Lord over every area of life. The ultimate question is not whether society approves, but whether God is pleased. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17). Perhaps the strongest test of all is this, If Jesus Christ were the most honoured Guest at my ceremony, would I need to change anything? If the answer is yes, then those things deserve serious reconsideration.

OUTWARD APPEARANCES ARE NOT EVERYTHING

The Pharisees portrayed themselves as being zealously religious. They had a reputation for strictly keeping the law. Yet Jesus saw through the façade and knew their religion was superficial.

Jesus said, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also*" (Matthew 23:25-26). Though others believed the Pharisees put God first, Jesus knew their highest priority was pleasing themselves.

He continued, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*" (Matthew 23:27-28). Others saw the Pharisees as model examples of righteous behavior, yet Jesus knew they were corrupt in their hearts and were filled with sin.

So remember that outward appearances are not everything. Yes, we need to set a good example for others, which requires us to do what is good so that others can see in us what a faithful servant of God is to be. Yet our heart also needs to be right so that our thoughts, intentions, and motivations are in harmony with God's will.

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