



UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

A Journal of Christian Evidences and Comparative Religions

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

(Colossians 2:8, NASB)

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From The Editor's Desk

With great joy, we present to you the seventeenth edition of *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine*. It is the first issue in the year 2025. We thank God for the grace He has given to us to see this new year. As usual, this journal is designed to teach the truth of God's word as well as expose the various arguments that have been prepared in defense of false religion and arguments designed to oppose the Christian faith. In order to cover a wide range of areas, various sections have been created in this journal and topics relating to each of the sections will be discussed at every edition in a consistent manner.

In the last edition of this journal, we examined various subjects under each of the sections such as: *Is progressive repentance scriptural?*; *Why so many churches?*; *A discourse on instrumental music in worship*; *Quibbles that Backfired*; *The Restoration Movement*; *The seven churches of Asia*; *Reaching today's generation*; *Do all religions worship the same God?*; *Pricilla and Aquilla: the couple who worked together in the Lord's kingdom*; *Is love required for initial salvation?* and a few other exciting topics.

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

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

The open-door policy of the magazine is still very much intact. If anyone disagrees with an article in any edition of the magazine, such could write a rebuttal to it and we would be willing to publish it in the same issue to which the article he is replying appeared. Alternatively, a proposition will be set for the writer of the article and whoever dissents to affirm and deny respectively as the case may be, with the aim of knowing the truth on the subject matter.

We wish you all a Happy New Year (2025) and pray that we all become more steadfast in the work of God. All the prayers, feedback and encouragements from readers are duly appreciated. We would continue to hold fast the pattern of sound words which we have heard from the apostles, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 1:13; Acts 2:42).

God's Love and Blessings.

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

Editor

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

Is Water Baptism A Swimming Exercise? A Response To Pastor Abel Damina

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba | Lagos, Nigeria

In a video interview with a popular Nigerian pastor, Abel Damina, the following question was asked: *“What is the contribution of water baptism to our salvation?”* In response, Pastor Damina said *“Water baptism has no connection to salvation at all. Water baptism is a swimming exercise.”* He proceeded to defend the statement by saying that (1) John the Baptist was not baptized and that means baptism is not necessary. (2) The purpose of John's baptism was to identify the Messiah and the moment John saw Jesus and baptized Him, water baptism expired. He concluded by alluding to Ephesians 4:4 that there is one baptism and that one baptism is the Holy Spirit baptism. He then said: *“When you receive Jesus, you are baptized into Christ. If you go to a river, you are baptized into water. That is two baptisms. You have disobeyed the Bible. That is why water baptism is swimming exercise.”*

In this writing, we will look at the position of Pastor Damina in light of what the Scriptures teaches.

Pastor Damina Does Not Know The Difference Between John's Baptism And That Of The Great Commission

When Pastor Damina claims that because John the Baptist was not baptized, then that means that water baptism is not necessary today, he is simply revealing the fact that he does not know the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism that Jesus commanded for all believers to be saved. Like the thief on the cross, we have no record of whether or not John the Baptist was baptized. But whether or not they were baptized is insignificant to the question that Pastor Damina was asked. Neither the thief on the cross nor John the Baptist could have been baptized

the way the New Covenant stipulates that you and I must be baptized. This is because Romans 6:3-4 teaches that to acquire newness of life, we must be baptized into Christ's death, be buried with Him in baptism and be raised from the dead. There was no way John or the thief on the cross would comply with this New Testament baptism because Christ had not yet died, be buried or even raised from the dead. Also, the Great Commission which included the command to baptize had not been given at this time. Besides, Romans 10:9 teaches that one needs to confess the Lord Jesus and believe in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead before he would be saved. Neither John nor the thief on the cross would have been able to believe this in their heart because Jesus had not died during their lifetime. So, when we are talking about the salvation of people **today**, the thief on the cross and anyone before the death of Christ should not be brought into the picture or cited as justification to disobey Christ's commandment.

Our salvation today is not based on John's baptism but the baptism commanded by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:1-16. Here, Jesus commanded His apostles to *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* This instruction was given years after John the Baptist was killed and after Jesus rose from the dead and it is to be obeyed by faithful disciples of Christ until the end of the world. If this command of baptism has expired, has the commanded to teach those baptized all that Christ commanded also expired?



To prove that John's baptism has nothing to do with our salvation, we see in Acts 19:1-7 that there were about twelve men who were rebaptized at Ephesus when Paul got there. These men had been baptized into John's baptism, yet, Paul said they needed to be baptized again according to Christ's commandment in order to be saved.

Pastor Damina is clearly mistaken when he said that water baptism ceased the moment John baptized Jesus. There are so many examples of baptisms in the New Testament after Jesus was baptized and people who engaged in them were not simply engaging in a swimming exercise but an action that would lead to the forgiveness of their sins, the salvation of their souls. Did the angel of the Lord direct Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch to preach to him and get him baptized in water simply because the Eunuch was so poor and could not afford a swimming pool at his house that he needed to stop along the way to engage in some swimming exercise in Acts 8:26-40? Was the Philippian jailor with all his household needing some swimming exercise in Acts 16:33-34 that they had to be baptized at "the same hour of the night"? How about the 3,000 souls in Acts 2:41 that were baptized "for the forgiveness of their sins" (Acts 2:38)? Were they also needing to engage in some form of swimming exercise? Was Saul's problem simply to have a swimming exercise that made Ananias say to him to "*Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" in Acts 22:16? Indeed, the urgency in the baptisms of these men show very clearly that they were not just done without real purpose but as the scriptures clearly reveal, were done for the forgiveness (or washing away) of their sins.

New Testament Teaching on Water Baptism

While Pastor Damina believes that water baptism is a swimming exercise that has no effect, the Bible teaches

clearly that baptism saves us. Consider the following points:

- Jesus said water is needed for anyone to be born again or see the kingdom of heaven (John 3:5). If going to the river to be baptized is to be baptized into water as Damina said, was Jesus teaching that you need a swimming exercise to enter the kingdom of God? Indeed, Jesus meant that water baptism is needed to be saved.
- Paul said that we put on Christ in baptism: "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:27).
- Peter said that water baptism saves us: "*There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*" (1 Peter 3:21).
- Peter said that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins: "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins: and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38).
- Jesus said only those who are baptized will be saved: "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*" (Mark 16:16).
- Water baptism is the one baptism spoken of in Ephesians 4:4 and not Holy Spirit Baptism as wrongly asserted by Damina. No man was ever given the authority to baptize people with the Holy Spirit. Only Christ could do that and no one was ever commanded to be baptized in the Holy Spirit – that was a promise and not a command (Acts 1:5).

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World Religions

2 Peter 3 And New Creation Theology


By Chris Reeves | Tennessee, USA

Peter's words in 2 Peter 3 are being used today to teach that the righteous will come back after the judgment day and live on a renovated earth for all eternity. Jehovah's Witnesses have used 2 Peter 3 this way for many years. More recently those who advocate New Creation Theology (NCT) are also using Peter's words in a similar way. Some brethren are even now beginning to use 2 Peter 3 this way. Simply put, will the earth one day be renovated or will it be annihilated? Let us turn our attention to some of the arguments being made in favor of renovation with a biblical refutation of each one.

Argument #1: God's destruction of the world with water in the past is "parallel" to his destruction of the world with fire in the future. The water of the flood in Noah's day is a "type/antitype" of the fire God will use at the end of time. Just as the water that God used in the flood did not completely annihilate the earth, so the fire will not completely annihilate the earth at the end of time.

Answer: First, we should not speak of things that are "parallel" to the flood without Peter telling us that they are parallel. We should not say, for example, that the flood is a "type/antitype" of the fire unless Peter uses that language (see 1 Peter 3:21). Anyone can come up with "types" and things that are "parallel" between the flood and the end of time and then insert them into the text, but this is eisegesis (reading into the text), not exegesis. Parallels and type/antitype comparisons are alleged by NCT advocates, but they are not actually supported by the text. Second, the comparison that Peter is making between the flood and the end of time is in reference to "the word of God" (verse 5, 7). Yes, we all recognize that Peter mentions three time periods: (1) creation and Noah's day - "heavens from of old" (verse 5); (2) Peter's day - "the heavens that now are" (verse 7); and, (3) a future day - "new heavens and a new earth" (verse 13). But,

the point of comparison between these three time periods is not what NCT advocates make of it. The comparison that Peter makes concerns God's promised word that brings judgment. God's word that created the world and brought about the judgment in the flood of Noah's day (verses 5-6) is "the same word" (verse 7) that will bring about the judgment of fire and destruction at the end of time. This comparison concerning God's word, and none other, can rightly be established from the text. The purpose and effects of the flood are not the "same" as the purpose and effects of the fire. The condition of the earth after the flood is not the "same" as the condition of the earth after the fire. What is the "same" between Noah's world, today, and the end of time, is the power and promise of God's word. God's word is powerful and God keeps His promised word. Peter makes this point about God's word in answer to the mockers' question in 2 Peter 3:4: "Where is the promise of his coming?" Peter's answer: God's word (verse 7) of promise will be kept (verse 13)! Third, look at all the material in the Bible about the flood outside of 2 Peter 3. What do you find? We are told about the flood in each scripture to teach us a lesson about how God judges ungodly men and saves the righteous (see Genesis 6-7; Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20-21; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:4-14). Peter is not making the "parallels" or "type/antitype" comparisons that some NCT advocates think he is making. Peter, in keeping with the rest of the scripture, tells us about the flood and then the fire to make his point about "the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (verse 7; see also Jude 14-23). Fourth, the purpose of God in using water in connection with the "world" (*kosmos*) of Noah's day was entirely different from His purpose



in using fire in connection with the “earth” (*ge*) at the end-time. These two distinct purposes are not parallel. The purpose of the flood was to “perish” (*apoleto*) the “world” (*kosmos*) - every living thing except Noah and his family and the animals in the ark (Genesis 6:7; 7:4, 21-23; 2 Peter 2:5). But (and note the “but” beginning verse 7), the purpose of the fire at the end of time is to dissolve (*lutheesetai*) the very heavens and “earth” (*ge*) themselves (verse 10, 12).

Argument #2: The destruction of sin is the main point of Peter, not the destruction of the earth. Verse 7 says that God will destroy ungodly men, not the earth.


Answer: It is true that Peter speaks of the “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (verse 7). The “day of the Lord” (verses 8-9) certainly involves the destruction of the ungodly men. Peter had already mentioned God's judgment against ungodly men in 2 Peter 2:4-6, and 9. However, the question and argument of the mockers in the immediate context deals with their view of “the creation” (verse 4), not with the sin of man. The mockers had ignored the agency of God's powerful word and His divine intervention. They claimed that “the creation” has always continued and nothing is going to change that. Peter responds by saying that the creation was made “by the word of God” (verse 5), God's word caused it to be “overflowed with water” (verse 6), and God's word will one day cause it to “pass away” with fire (verses 7, 10-12). The “day of the Lord” is not just about punishing sinners, it is also about removing all together our present heavens and earth to make way for the new heavens and earth (verse 13). Jesus plainly said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away” (Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33).

Argument #3: The fire of 2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12 is the fire of testing and proving (just like in 1 Peter 1:7 and 4:12). This fire is like the fire of the smelting process.

This fire will not destroy the earth; it will simply test it and prove it. This fire will bring about a “cosmic renewal” of the earth through testing and proving.

Answer: First, we all recognize that there are passages in both the OT (Malachi 3:2-4; 4:1) and NT that speak of God using fire to test his *people*. “Fire” can certainly be used figuratively in the context of testing *people* (1 Corinthians 3:13-14; 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12; etc).

But, what words in the 2 Peter 3 context indicate that the fire here is being used for testing? There are no words in 2 Peter 3 mentioning “proving,” “testing,” or “trial” like in the other passages mentioned above. In fact, read all of 2 Peter and you will not find one reference to testing, proving, or trial like you do in 1 Peter. Second, fire for testing is *figurative*, but Peter has been speaking of *literal* water (verse 5-6) and now of *literal* fire in the dissolving of the earth (verse 7; see Hebrews 6:8). The words Peter actually uses in verses 10-12 are associated with *literal* fire, fire that burns (the Greek word *pyri* used here is also found in Revelation 21:8 for the fire of hell). Here are Peter's words: “great noise,” “dissolved” (3x), “fervent heat” (2x), “burned up,” “being on fire,” and “melt.” Peter's graphic and intense description makes it clear that a world conflagration is meant. The earth that God once “compact” (verse 5), He will one day destroy by loosing it, releasing it and dissolving it (*lutheesetai*). Third, the fire of 2 Peter 3 is not for testing or proving, but for dissolving. The fire is for “the earth and the works that are therein” (verse 10) and for “the heavens” (verse 12). The fire (verse 7) is not for some alleged “cosmic renewal,” but is for the dissolving of our present heavens and earth (verses 10-12). The fire will cause the heavens to “pass away” (see also Matthew 24:35; Revelation 20:11; and Revelation



21:1) and the elements (*stoicheia*, i.e., the elemental particles or components of the universe) to be “dissolved with fervent heat” (verse 10). God’s fire is for the dissolving of the physical heavens and the earth (annihilation), not for their testing, proving, or renovation as some allege. We must be content to use the language of Peter, not the language of contemporary scholars.


Argument #4: The translation “will be found,” “discovered,” or “laid bare” in verse 10 is better than “burned up.” The ancient manuscript evidence is better for *εὑρεθήσεται* (“found,” “discovered,” NWT; “laid bare,” NIV, NET) than for *κατακαήσεται* (“burned up,” KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASV, RSV, etc.). Thus, the earth and its works will be “discovered” or “laid bare” for renovation. The earth will not be “burned up” or annihilated, it will be renovated.

Answer: Limited space here does not permit me to deal with all the issues involved in the textual criticism of this verse. However, a few brief comments can be made. First, the translators of several important versions (see above) retained the word *κατακαήσεται* and translated it “burned up”. They did so because of the presence of this word in some ancient manuscripts and the immediate context of verses 10-12 which uses language associated with literal fire and burning (see above). Second, even if the manuscript evidence is better for *εὑρεθήσεται* (“found,” “discovered,” or “laid bare”), it is not a necessary conclusion that our present earth will be “laid bare” for the purpose of renovation. If Peter in fact used *εὑρεθήσεται*, then his point in this context would be that the earth and works will be discovered and exposed to God’s judgment of fire (verse 7, 10, 12). The earth and its works will have been discovered, laid bare and exposed to God fiery judgment when everything melts away and is dissolved. J.H. Thayer comments on this word: “γῆ καὶ

τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὑρεθήσεται *shall be found* namely, for destruction, i.e. will be unable to hide themselves from the doom decreed them by God, [2 Peter 3:10](#)” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 261). “Laid bare” for destruction better fits the immediate context of verses 7, 10-12, than “laid bare” for renovation. (Note: For those wanting to study this issue further, you will want to take note that the latest 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland’s *Novum Testamentum Graece* reads: οὐκ εὑρεθήσεται, “will not be found”. If this is the original reading, then the matter is closed. There will be no earth or works therein found after God’s judgment of fire.)

Argument #5: The word “new” in verse 13 is from the Greek word *kainos*, meaning “new in quality.” This is not the Greek word *neos*, meaning “new in time”. The “new heavens and a new earth” will be the old heavens and earth renovated and given a new quality of existence.

Answer: First, Peter indeed uses the word *kainos* in verse 13, and yes, it does mean “new in quality”. However, the word *kainos* also carries with it the idea of something brand new (new in time). New in quality does not necessarily eliminate the idea of new in time or new in substance. For example, the “new” (*kainous*) wineskins in Matthew 9:17 (same word and form as 2 Peter 3:13) were not old wineskins that were renovated. They were completely new wineskins which replaced the old ones. The old wineskins were discarded and “new” (*kainos*) wineskins were made and used. Second, to argue that *kainos* means that something old is renovated does not hold up elsewhere in the NT. Who among us would argue that the “new” (*kainos*) man of 2 Corinthians 5:17 is simply the old man renovated, the “new” (*kainos*) covenant of Hebrews 8:8, 13 is simply the old



covenant renovated, or the “new” (*kainos*) Jerusalem of Revelation 21:2 is simply the old, literal Jerusalem renovated? Third, the word “But” which begins verse 13 introduces a contrast between two different dwelling places, our physical earth now with ungodly men (verse 7), and that of a future new dwelling place for the righteous only (verse 13-14). This “new” dwelling place for God's people is in heaven (Matthew 5:12; 6:20; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 1:5; 1 Peter 1:4; Hebrews 11:16; 12:22-23; 2 Timothy 4:18), not on a renovated physical earth.


Argument #6: The phrase “new heavens and a new earth” in verse 13 is used literally, not symbolically.

Answer: Peter uses the phrase “new heavens and a new earth” in a fashion consistent with Isaiah (65:17 and 66:22) and John (Revelation 21:1). Studying the use of this phrase by Isaiah and by John helps us to understand that Peter is using this phrase figuratively. When you study the context of this phrase used by Isaiah, Peter, and John, you will find that all three use this phrase to mean a new order, realm or environment for God's people that does not involve a literal earth. What God's people have experienced in the past is now gone (Isaiah 65:17-25; 2 Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 20:11; 21:1, 4) and a “new” order or realm awaits them (Isaiah 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-3, 5). Isaiah, Peter, and John do not use this phrase to mean a literal, renovated heaven and earth for God's people. (For more on this topic, see the article by Kyle Pope elsewhere in this special issue.)

It is certainly good to answer error and false teaching with God's word as I have hoped to do here, but we must also remember the importance of learning what Peter is actually teaching. Therefore, I would like to close with some practical admonitions concerning the coming judgment day of 2 Peter 3. Peter wanted his audience to be stirred up to remember some

important truths concerning the Lord's coming and final judgment (verses 1-2). They were to remember some things and not to be carried away by the error of the mockers (verses 3-4, see also verse 17). What did Peter want them to remember?

First, they were to remember that when God speaks concerning coming judgment, God keeps His promised word. God's word is powerful and certain (verses 5-7). Second, they were to remember that a judgment day will indeed come and God is not slack (as the mockers suggested) concerning His promise of that day (verses 8-9). Third, they were to remember that God's delay is not a sign of weakness, but in fact, one of strength. God is good and longsuffering and He delays His coming to give an opportunity for all to come to repentance (verse 9, see also verse 15 and Romans 2:4). Fourth, they were to remember that the day of the Lord would come unannounced and unexpected, “as a thief” (verse 10). They must be ready. Fifth, they were to remember that the heavens and the earth they presently know would one day “pass away” and “be dissolved”; it would all be gone (verses 10-12). Sixth, they were to remember to maintain “holy living and godliness” while they are waiting for the Lord's coming (verse 11). They must be “found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight” (verse 14). Seventh, they were to remember, like Abraham (Hebrews 11:10, 16), to “look for” something “new” and heavenly (verses 12-14). Finally, they were to remember that some who were “ignorant and unsteadfast” would twist the scriptures to their own destruction before the Lord comes (verse 16). (Note: This very chapter is being twisted by NCT advocates and others who come to the text with their preconceived idea of a renovated earth. They start with a theology of a renovated earth, twist these verses to make their theology fit, and then end of making



Peter say the opposite of what he is really saying. They have the earth remaining in a renovated state when Peter said it would pass away!) They were not to be carried away with the error of the wicked or fall from their own steadfastness (verse 17). Instead, they must remember to grow in grace and knowledge (verse 18). It is my desire that we all today be reminded of these same things so that we can be prepared to meet the Lord when He comes in judgment.

Christian, Read Good Biographies!

The Lives Of Great Men All Remind Us...We Have A Cloud Of Witnesses

In my library I have more than forty books reviewing the lives of various religious leaders, mostly gospel preachers of earlier generations. These books constitute a valuable part of my library, not from the standpoint of their cost, but because of the great examples of faith they preserve.

Hebrews 11 recounts instances of faith in the lives of many Bible characters. These cases serve to encourage us toward lives of faithfulness, even in the face of trials. Though these men and women were not perfect (that is, sinless), they do stand as examples that can help us even today (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:10-11). Similarly, I believe that Christians can benefit greatly from reading books which tell of the godly lives of servants of the Lord during the last two centuries.

Of course, it must be recognized that these people, although they are to be admired and respected for their work's sake, were human beings, sometimes characterized by weaknesses and faults so typical of many others. Yet, there is a valuable lesson even here--- "that ye might learn...not to think of men above that which is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6). We must not be

so naive and gullible as to think that these men made no mistakes. Yet, many of them were stalwart soldiers of the cross who suffered many hardships, both physical and spiritual, in order to declare the truth of God to lost souls.

As I have read about the lives of these men, I have often been brought to tears as some sad event was described, and as often I have laughed aloud as a humorous incident was recounted. Some of these occurrences I have re-read again and again with profit. In my opinion, far too many Christians have overlooked this source of information and encouragement. It is tragic that Christians generally take time to read so many different types of material (newspapers, magazines, non-religious books, etc.), some of which may be of little or no actual value, yet fail to read wholesome, uplifting literature (including the Bible, good books, and periodicals). I think that this is symptomatic of the general lack of spirituality in the church today. We need to seriously consider Paul's instruction in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,...honest,...just,...pure,... lovely,...of good report;...think on these things."

I shall not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of biographical works which I believe Christians should read; however, I would suggest a few with which you might begin: *J.D. Tant – Texas Preacher* (by Yater Tant), *W.W. Otey: Contender For The Faith* (by Cecil Willis), and *They Being Dead Yet Speak* (1981 Florida College Lectures). In addition, bound volumes of *Faith And Facts* contain many biographical sketches of gospel preachers. These sketches have been a frequent feature of this quarterly since its first issue.

Why not start reading one of these books today?

Thomas N. Thrasher | Alabama, USA

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World Religions

Beware Of Being Tossed And Carried About By Wind Of Doctrines!

By Joseph I. Oyerinde | Osun, Nigeria

"If your pastor says he doesn't want tithes, don't leave his church ooo. If he says all he wants is offering, give him offering. But if your heart tells you that you should give God at least 10%, find a church nearby where the pastor says we can collect tithes and use it to the glory of God, then give that Pastor your tithe. So, you don't quarrel with your pastor, and you don't quarrel with God"
—Pastor E. A. Adeboye

After the first public drama of Pastor Enoch Adeboye about the issue of tithes boomeranged and brought up series of scriptural objection which proved him erroneous and misleading, he surprisingly further attempted to offer solution to calm the atmosphere. It is surprising that his gullible followers who are ignorant of the truth still continue to applaud him. Thus, this writing attempts to briefly examine his offered solution in light of sound teaching of the scripture for sincere people to come to the light of the truth.

Failure To Recognize Scriptural Authority For Religious Practice

From the supposed solution that Pastor Adeboye offered, he failed to recognize scriptural authority for whatever to teach and practice in Christianity (cf. Matthew 21: 23-28). He considers the heart as the source of authority to determine what someone should practice. He claimed that "if your heart tells you that you should give God at least 10%..." This was the same way Jeroboam perverted the rightful place and time to worship God as he devised in his own heart a different place and time (cf. 1 Kings 12:32-33). Behold, by so doing, he and other Israelites worshipped not God but idols. Proverbs 28:26 says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso

walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."

Contrariwise, we are instructed to take the scriptures as the only acceptable source of authority for whatever to teach or do in Christianity (Colossians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 14:37). Consequently, we are warned to think not beyond what is written, and neither to add nor subtract from the scriptures (1 Corinthians 4:6; Revelation 22:18-19). We are equally commanded to properly handle the scriptures aright (2 Tim. 2:15). The human heart is never to be considered as the right source to tell what to teach, believe or practice in Christianity.

Failure To Maintain Doctrinal Unity

Within the solution of Pastor Adeboye, he considered the situation of two pastors teaching and practicing contradictory doctrines as worthwhile and acceptable. One pastor teaches to accept tithes, while the other does not. Two wrongs do not make a right. How can one pastor who claimed to be of God refuse to take tithes; while another pastor who equally claimed to be of God accept it? That is absolutely confusion and division! But God is not the author of such confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Furthermore, the apostle Paul appealed to the early Christians to teach and practice same thing and eschew division. He said, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Corinthians 1:10). In fact, He further warned that we mark and avoid those who cause division and offenses as a result of their teaching contrary to the doctrine of Christ, because such people serve not the Lord Jesus (Romans 16:17).

Attempting To Please Men And God

The conclusion of Pastor Adeboye's offered solution is for people to both please their pastor and God. He opined that giving tithes to some pastors who love to collect it, and not giving those who do not want it is a balance means of pleasing both men and God.

However, on the contrary, while serving God, we are not demanded to please men but God. Apostle Paul said, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10). King Saul ended up disobeying God when he attempted to please his people rather than God (1 Samuel 13:8-14). We are to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Conclusion

It is beyond a gainsaying that Pastor Adeboye is clearly expressing his human wisdom in religious affairs. He does not recognize the scriptures as the sole authority for what to teach and practice in Christianity; let alone to know that Christians are not under Judaism where tithes is required. Neither does he really care about the true unity in Christ. His intention is to please himself while misleading people to adhere to ordinances of Judaism which Christians today are not obligated to observe (Galatians 3:10-24; 5:3-4; Hebrews 7:12; 8:6-13; 2 Corinthians 3:14; Colossians 2:14-16). Beware! God is not the author of such confusion!

THE MIND OF CHRIST

The Christians attitude should be the attitude of Christ. The essence of Jesus' attitude can be summed up in five qualities which were at the core of His character, the center of His Being and the heart of who He was. His attitude was: (1) Sacrificial. Instead of holding on to His Heavenly status, Jesus was willing to

turn lose of it to come to earth and die as the sacrifice or sin-offering for us. He was willing to pay the price regardless of the cost. He calls on us to be a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12: 1-2). We should ask ourselves "Is there anything I am holding on to, clutching and grasping tightly, that I need to turn loose so I might better serve God and my fellowman?" Consider what Jesus gave up coming to this low ground of sin and sorrow. It is hard to understand what it would mean to enjoy the glories of heaven and then, suddenly, to find oneself encased in the flesh of humanity. We can only thank God that He was willing to make such a sacrifice for us. (2) Submissive. Why did Paul emphasize that Jesus was self-emptying, serving, sympathetic, submissive, and sacrificing? He wanted us to know that to have harmony, peace and unity, we need to be like Jesus. He calls on us to tread the path already trodden by Christ Himself. He said: "Not My will but Your will be done." Jesus didn't have a stubborn mindset, but His was a surrendered mind. He knew His Father's purpose for His life and was subservient to it. (3) Selfless. Jesus was not a self-exalting person but a self-abasing one. The irony was that Jesus was the fullness of Deity in bodily form, but He was not full of Himself (Col. 2: 9). (4) Servile. Jesus' life was one of service. We must embrace the mindset and attitude of Jesus. Mark 10: 43-45 says: "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and gave my life as a ransom of many." He also said: "If any of you wants to be My follower you must deny yourself (put aside your selfish ambition), shoulder your cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16: 24). Christ was servant minded. Spiritual. Jesus' focus was on the spirit instead of the flesh, on the spiritual instead of the material, on the heavenly instead of the earthly (Col. 3: 1-10). Without a spiritual focus we cannot possess the mind of Christ. What is your mindset? Think on these things.
Dennis Abernathy

DISCOURSE

May Women Speak in Mixed Gender Bible Classes?

The topic for discussion in this section is on whether the New Testament authorizes women to speak in a mixed gender Bible classes. John Wallace of Ontario, Canada affirms that the New Testament reveals that women should not teach by speaking in mixed gender church meetings while Keith Sharp of Arkansas, USA, denies the proposition. Readers are encouraged to read both articles with their Bibles.

The New Testament reveals that women should not teach by speaking in mixed gender church meetings

Affirmative: John Wallace | Church of Christ

I affirm that the N.T. reveals that women should not teach by speaking in mixed gender church meetings.

Introductory Remarks: My purpose in this debate is to show a consistent, scriptural method of women's conduct in all church meetings.

How does God want us to conduct all our church meetings?

In our ten church meetings, we allow women to speak in the first four, but are silent in last six. 1. Sunday A.M. Bible study. 2. Wed. Bible study. 3. Women's monthly or weekly Bible study. 4. Vacation Bible school and children's weekly Bible classes. 5. Sunday A.M. worship. 6. Men's weekly or monthly Bible study. 7. Sunday P.M. worship; 8. Elder's meetings. 9. Men's business meetings in absence of elders. 10. Gospel meetings. Is the above practice according to God's Word?

Note below God's seven universal/eternal church meeting conduct rules mentioned in I Cor.14:1-40. These rules are not just for the Corinthian's Sun. worship, but for all church meetings then and now, just like all N.T. principles apply then and now unless context suggests otherwise; I Cor. 4:17. This fact is confirmed by a study of all N.T. church meetings: women did not speak/teach in any mg. (mixed gender) church meetings with apostolic consent with four exceptions mentioned below. A study of thirty versions, three lexicons, Strong and Vine, all these

Greek language authorities agreed: women should not speak where it usurps authority in church or home.

All mg. church meetings should be conducted 1. in love- V.1; 2. with edification Vs. 3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26; 3. with words easily understood- V. 9-19. 4. with speakers speaking one at a time- V. 29-31; 5. with peace, without confusion- V. 33; 6. with women's silence- V.34-35; 7. With decency and order- V40.

If we avoid one of God's conduct rules- women's silence in mg. Bible studies- we can by the same reasoning avoid all 7 rules and have meetings like the Corinthian church meetings, which Paul condemned.

There are four God -made exceptions to women's silence in mg. church meetings: 1. Women's mutual singing with men; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19. 2. Women making the good confession before baptism; Rom. 10:9; Matt.10:32; Act 8:37. 3. Women confessing sins in church meetings are following Peter's example of giving Sapphira an opportunity to confess her sin before the church; Acts 5:1-12. 4. Women teaching women and children in church classes and in VBS; Titus 2:2-4; I Tim.5:10-14.

Disagreements over women's silence in some church meetings is conditioned on the meaning of the noun hesuchia (quiet/silence) as used in I Tim. 2:11-12. Thayer's Lexicon: "2. silence: Acts 22:2; I Tim. 2:11."



Barry's Lexicon: "(1) silence Acts: 22:2; I Tim. 2:11." The Analytical Greek Lexicon: "silence, silent attention, Ax. 22: 2; I Tim. 2: 11-12." Granted, hesuchia and its derivatives are given other meanings in other scriptures by these lexicons, but we are dealing exclusively with its meaning in I Tim. 2: 11-12. Women's silence doesn't mean some silence, some speaking in mg. Bible studies; i.e.- silence in teaching, leading songs or prayers, but speaking to comment, to ask and answer questions and read the Bible. Truth is always consistent and corroborative, but we are inconsistent and unscriptural in the way women are treated in our mg. Bible studies.

In I Tim. 2:11-12 Paul used the generic expression "I do not permit a women to teach," he did not use the more specific term "to be the teacher" which some believe he did say; "to teach" includes the teaching of the teacher, but not only of the teacher, but the teaching of all men over whom she should not usurp authority. Paul also said women should not usurp authority over "man," which includes more than the teacher. This is verified by the speaking of women in I Cor. 14: 34-35 causing them to usurp authority of all men in assembly. These women by speaking were doing shameful and unlawful acts and women speaking in mg. Bible study are doing similar things. This info. should nullify the doctrine that only the words of a teacher are teaching and women's comments in mg. Bible study are not teaching nor usurping authority.

The teaching- learning connection: if one is learning from the words of another, the one listening is the learner and the one talking is the teacher, no matter how much teaching is being done nor who is the listener and who is the talker. This principle applies to a few words of comments or a half hour of comments by men or women in mg. Bible studies.

How to recognize when women start usurping authority in mixed gender church meetings.

1. The moment women start talking like men.
2. The moment women's words start teaching men.
3. The moment men become quiet learners by the words of talkative women.
4. The moment that women fail to be completely subjected, silent, non teaching learners to avoid usurping authority.

Paul said, "Let women keep silent in the churches". The NIV in I Cor.14: 33 says; "As in all the churches of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches." Mg. Bible studies are church meetings, therefore women should remain silent in these meetings. First century churches had one weekly meeting- Sun. Worship- and in this one meeting women were to be silent. Today we have two weekly church meetings where women can speak. Where is the authority for a church adding two weekly mg. Bible studies where women can speak?

Conducting all mg. church meetings decently and orderly includes women's silence in these meetings, therefore women speaking in these meetings would make them indecent and disorderly; I Cor.14: 33-40. To please God in Bible classes, we should have separate men's/women's classes, where women in their own classes can teach, comment, lead singing, pray and read the Bible.

Understanding correctly Paul's terms of demeanour and terms of activity used in I Tim. 2:11-12.

Women should be (terms of demeanour)	Women should not do (terms of activity)	
Quiet/Silent	opposite term	Talking – action which results in teaching
Learning	opposite term	Teaching – action resulting in usurping
Submissive	opposite term	Usurping – the result of wrongful teaching



Advocates of women speaking in mg. Bible study obligate themselves to specify how long a women can speak before she usurps authority- will it be thirty seconds or thirty minutes? According to the Bible it is zero seconds; the same amount of time she can lead prayers in mg. Bible studies. Women can teach anyone, anywhere and any time they do not usurp authority in so doing; II Tim. 2:2.

Some believe that changes made to N.T. principles allows women to speak in church meetings.

1. The change from the whole church gathered together in one place (I Cor. 14:23) to dividing into many classes for Bible study nullifies women's silence so they can speak in mg. Bible classes.
2. The change from Sun. Worship (Acts 20:7) to a weekly gospel meeting nullifies women silence so they can lead the singing in gospel meetings.
3. The change from having the Lord's Supper on Sun, (Acts 20: 7-8) to having no Supper during gospel meetings, nullifies women's silence so they can lead prayers in the gospel meetings.
4. The change from having Sun. giving (I Cor. 16: 1-2) to having no giving in gospel meetings nullifies women silence so women can make the opening and closing remarks in a gospel meeting.

Because of similarity, if not bound by church tradition, one can see that all four above are unscriptural.

Declaring women's silence in mg. Bible study as a matter of opinion on which we can differ, does not make it so. No apostle ever said that women's silence in mg. church meetings is a matter of opinion. Paul treated women's silence in mg. church meetings as a matter of faith, like baptism, church music and frequency of the Lord's Supper. Denominations, without any scriptural support, justify their

differences on these matters by declaring them all as matters of opinion. It is improper to justify our differences on matters of faith- i.e. women speaking in mg. church meetings- by declaring them as matters of opinion. Have we forgotten the old adage- "In matters of faith – unity; in matters of opinion- liberality; in all matters – love."? Where does the N.T. say that women's silence in mg. church meetings are matters of opinion? The echo comes roaring back loud and clear, Where? Where? Where? My fervent prayer: that in matters of faith, we all speak the same things with be no divisions among us.

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is defined as *"The quality of being thankful, readiness to show appreciation for, and to return kindness."* God's grace evokes gratitude in one's heart, and a thankful heart will express it. But sadly, many lack gratitude and are not thankful for the blessings God give us every day. In fact, more and more are becoming atheistic in their thinking. Such a mindset is void of God, the true source of gratitude. For example, nineteenth century English writer Harriet Martineau was something of an atheist. One day, reveling in the beauties of an autumn morning, she burst out, *"Oh, I'm so grateful!"*-to which her believing companion replied, *"Grateful to whom, my dear?"* Romans 1: 21-22 says, *"Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools."* We still live in a world that often fails to glorify God and thank Him for His wondrous blessings.

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DISCOURSE

May Women Speak in Mixed Gender Bible Classes

The New Testament reveals that women should not teach by speaking in mixed gender church meetings

Denial: Keith Sharp | Church of Christ

Brother Wallace is self-contradictory. He affirms women may sing in the assembly but denies they may teach. When they sing they teach (Colossians 3:16).

Brother Wallace has ten different kinds of church meetings. First Corinthians 14 is for when “the whole church comes together in one place” (verse 23). It doesn't specifically pertain to our classes. Further, its purpose is to regulate the use of miraculous, spiritual gifts in the worship assembly of the church. The context is Paul's dissertation on spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40). Twenty seven of the forty verses of chapter fourteen specifically refer to spiritual gifts.

I agree with all seven of his rules. But number 6, “women's silence”, we both believe is qualified. He allows them to sing. They speak and teach when they sing (Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16). Paul reveals by the law of contrast the kind of speaking he forbids; “they are to be submissive, as the law also says” (verse 34). Women may not do any speaking in an assembly of the church where men are present by which they would be exercising authority (cf. Titus 2:15).

First Timothy 2:11-12 is not limited to the worship assembly. The assembly is neither mentioned nor implied. Furthermore, First Timothy 2:11-12 does not forbid a woman to teach. She is not “to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (verse 12). Either the phrase “over a man” qualifies both “teach” and “have authority,” or a woman cannot teach anything to anyone anywhere. She wouldn't be allowed to teach her child to tie his shoe laces. A

woman may not be the teacher in charge of a Bible class in which men are present.

Brother Wallace needs to explain why a woman in a Bible class in which all are invited to answer questions, ask questions, and make brief comments is exercising authority. If a child in a home Bible class taught by his mother answers a question, asks a question, or makes a brief comment, has the child exercised authority over his mother (cf. Ephesians 6:1; Luke 2:51)?

“if one is learning from the words of another, the one listening is the learner and the one talking is the teacher.” Does this mean the men must not listen to the women singing in the assembly? (Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16) Why not?

Certainly commenting is teaching. So is singing (Colossians 3:16).

“How to recognize when women start usurping authority in mixed gender church meetings.” When a woman is over the men (1 Timothy 2:11-12), i.e., when she is in charge of the class. I hasten to add that “silence” (“quiet,” NASB, ESV) would preclude a woman from being talkative and domineering in a mixed Bible class.

First Corinthians fourteen specifically applies to “when the whole church comes together in one place” (verse 23). I don't know how many different kinds of gatherings the first century church had, but Paul taught over the whole church assembled (Acts 20:7) and groups smaller than the whole church (Acts 20:17; Galatians 2:2). The “...women speaking in these meetings would make them indecent and disorderly,” therefore, women singing “in these meetings would make them indecent and disorderly”



(Ephesians 5:18-19). If not, why not?

Brother Wallace wants to have separate men's and women's classes. We do have a ladies class where I preach from which men are excluded, but to forbid mixed gender classes is to make a law where God made none. Apollos, Aquila, and his wife Priscilla, were in a mixed gender Bible study, and Priscilla, along with Aquila, taught Apollos "the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). I, as the apostle Paul, "refuse to yield submission even for an hour" to human religious laws (Galatians 2:3-5).

Brother Wallace's application of his "terms of demeanor" eliminates women singing in the worship assembly (Colossians 3:16).

If we must set a time limit on women speaking, must we set a time limit on our songs? (Ephesians 5:18-19) Brother Wallace's time limit (0 seconds) eliminates women singing in the worship assembly.

"Women can teach anyone, anywhere and any time they do not usurp authority in so doing; II Tim. 2:2." Amen! Logically and scripturally Brother Wallace surrendered his position.

I do not agree with any of the four positions Brother Wallace says some believe, nor does my position imply them.

The kind of silence Paul demands is not a matter of opinion. Women must not speak, either in the worship assembly or Bible classes, in such a way they are not "submissive" (1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11) or "have authority over a man" (1 Timothy 2:12).

I remind the reader: Brother Wallace is self-contradictory. He affirms women may sing in the assembly but denies they may teach. When they sing they teach (Colossians 3:16).

GRATITUDE

Continued from pg. 16

Truly knowing God obligates us to glorify Him and to be thankful and recognize our dependence upon Him. The charge against Belshazzar in the Old Testament was: "*The God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified*" (Dan. 5: 23). Sadly though, Romans 1: 21 indicts not only the world in general; it also indicts us. We often fail to count our blessings and express our dependence upon and gratitude to God "*who richly supplies us with all things we enjoy.*" (1 Tim. 6: 17; Jas. 1: 17). Neglect and ingratitude i.e. the failure to glorify God and be thankful leads to darkened minds and the failure to "*retain God in our knowledge*" which in turn leads to darkened lives. (Rom. 1: 23-32).

Johnson Oatman, Jr's hymn admonishes us toward gratitude and thankfulness.

*"When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done."*

Because we are grateful and depend upon God, we should regularly direct our prayers to Him and "*look up*" in watchfulness for His answer. David said: "*My voice shalt Thy hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct my prayer unto Thee and will look up*" (Psalms 5: 3). My friend, are you grateful to God? Do you glorify, honor, and give thanks to Him every day? Think on these things.

Dennis Abernathy

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 debated J. Ervin Waters on two occasions. In one of the debates held in Quincy, Illinois, they were discussing the matter of the communion service, and Waters was contending that in the administrations of the fruit of the vine, only one drinking vessel can be used in serving the congregation. During the course of it, Porter asked the question: If serving the congregation the fruit of the vine from one drinking vessel, the cup should accidentally be dropped, and its contents spilled, how would you serve the rest of the congregation? If you get another cup and finish it up, why you use two cups instead of one; you have part of the congregation served from one cup, and another part from another drinking vessel. How would you serve the rest of them? Brother Waters said: "I would get another cup and serve the entire congregation."

"You mean you would serve all those who had already taken of it, you would go and serve the whole thing again?" Porter asked. "Yes, I would serve the entire congregation." Waters responded. And he said, "Brother Porter, if you were baptizing a man, and because of a slippery ground, or in some way, you lost your balance, you failed to get the man under, and had him only partly buried, what would you do? Would you baptize the whole man, or just baptize the part that you had not baptized?" Porter said, "Well, in that case, brother Waters, I would baptize the whole man. But I will tell you what I would not do. If I had baptized a number of them right before him, I wouldn't bring them back and baptize them again."

In response, Waters said, "Brother Porter the difference is this: In baptizing, the man is the unit, but in the communion service, the congregation is the unit." That was the quibble that he followed the other quibble with. But upon the basis of that, the whole congregation must commune. The whole congregation must take the Lord's Supper before anyone has done it. And if by some reason or the other, one may be forced to leave the audience, if a person becomes sick and has to leave and cannot stay for the communion service, the others just as well dismiss and go home, because regardless of what they do, the unit has not done it.

In 1936, when W. Curtis Porter met Mr. H. A. Thompson in Weatherford, Texas, they were discussing Rom. 6:3-4 about burying the man. Mr. Thompson claimed that a man is raised in newness of life before he is buried in baptism. Porter claimed that we buried a dead, then he is raised to walk in newness of life. During the course of it, they had a great deal to say about burying the dead man as a live man, which man are you burying, and so on. On the last night of the discussion, Mr. Thompson gave Porter a written question and said, "Mr. Porter, if you bury a dead man, is it not true that you become a religious undertaker instead of a gospel preacher?" Porter said, "Maybe so. But if I bury a live man, then I would be a religious murderer. I think I had rather be a religious undertaker."

Church History

Division in the Restoration Movement

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

As a reminder, when we talk about the *Restoration Movement*, we are referring to the religious movement that began around the start of the nineteenth century in the United States that endeavored to restore the doctrines and practices of the first-century church as described in the New Testament. Thomas Campbell's statement ("Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.") became the unofficial motto of this movement that called upon people to leave the churches and creeds of men and unite together by following the New Testament as their only rule of faith and practice.

In the previous article in this series, we talked about *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*. This document explained why Barton W. Stone and the other co-signers were dissolving the newly-formed Springfield Presbytery. They saw the problems that existed in the denomination they just left (the Presbyterian Church) and, in essence, formed a new denomination. They realized that this did not solve the problem but only added to the division in the religious world. So they dissolved the Springfield Presbytery and encouraged all believers to leave the churches of men and unite upon the Bible alone.

Another document written early on in this movement was the *Declaration and Address*. This was written by Thomas Campbell in 1809 as an attempt to "restore unity, peace, and purity to the whole Church of God" by "returning to and holding fast by the original standard; taking the Divine word alone for our rule." As Campbell explained, this meant rejecting "anything of human authority, of private opinion, or inventions of men, as having any place in the constitution, faith, or worship, of the Christian

Church." He argued that we must be able to produce a "Thus saith the Lord, either in express terms, or by approved precedent" for anything we do pertaining to our "Christian faith and duty."

This movement grew through the efforts and influence of Stone, Campbell, and like-minded brethren as more believers adopted the Restoration plea. Unfortunately, the unity that characterized the beginning of the Restoration Movement did not last. Two major issues divided those who made up this movement – the missionary society and instrumental music in worship. Let us briefly discuss these issues.

The Missionary Society

After leaving the denominations of men, the only organization through which the men of the Restoration Movement could work together was the local church. Yet it would not remain this way among all of them. The move toward the *missionary society* began with "association" meetings. In 1828, there was an association meeting in Warren, Ohio. It "came together purely and simply as an assembly of Christians" (Amos S. Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve*, p. 103). Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, and others attended (*ibid.* p. 104). However, it became more than just an informal assembly when they selected Walter Scott as "the evangelist of the association" and sent him out with the commission to preach the gospel with the assistance of William Hayden (*ibid.* p. 109, 111-112).

These "associations" started as informal assemblies and evolved into formal organizations. Churches would send delegates to the society's meetings (usually within a particular state). The society would



decide upon a particular evangelistic work, commission the men who would be involved in that work, and fund their efforts. This meant that churches were surrendering a degree of autonomy and decision-making power to the missionary society. This violated the New Testament teaching about local churches being *autonomous* (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-4). It also ignored the fact that the local church is the only *organization* that has been given the responsibility of spreading the gospel (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:8). Yet once this departure started, the problem would only grow larger.

After many brethren became accustomed to the concept of a missionary society at the state level, they eventually thought they needed something larger at the national level. Hence, the American Christian Missionary Society was formed in 1849. Alexander Campbell did not attend their first meeting but was elected President of the body.

Campbell defended the Missionary Society by arguing that “since God had not specified any means through which the church universal was to accomplish this work, that it was left to the church to devise an expedient means through which the universal church might work. Hence, a Missionary Society” (Donald Townsley, *Church History*, p. 74). However, the problem with his argument is that the universal church collectively was not given the task of evangelism. The only collectivity involved in preaching in the New Testament was the *local* church. The Missionary Society was a human institution which was founded, organized, directed, and funded by men that attempted to do the work the Lord expects the local church to do.

The apostle Paul was able to say that the gospel had been “*proclaimed in all creation under heaven*”

(Colossians 1:23). This was accomplished in the first century without any “missionary society,” only the work of local churches and individual Christians doing the work of evangelism. Yet brethren in the nineteenth century thought they had a “better” way than this, and division resulted as they implemented it.

Instrumental Music

The first instance of a musical instrument being brought into the worship of the church among those associated with the Restoration Movement occurred in Midway, Kentucky, in 1859. The preacher at the congregation was L. L. Pinkerton. He stated that, at the time, he was the “only ‘preacher’ in Kentucky of our brotherhood who has publicly advocated the propriety of employing instrumental music...and that the church of God in Midway is the only church that has yet made a decided effort to introduce it” (*The Voice of the Pioneers on Instrumental Music and Societies*, p. 161). However, although he was the first, Pinkerton would not be the last to advocate for this.

Like the formation of the missionary society, the introduction of instrumental music in worship constituted a departure from the pattern found in the New Testament. When the New Testament specified the local church as the organization through which Christians were to work in order to spread the gospel, that made other institutions (like the missionary society) unauthorized. In the same way, the New Testament specified *singing* as the type of music we are to offer in worship to God (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), which makes other types of music (including instrumental music) unauthorized. Because of this similarity, brethren generally fell into one of two camps – (1) those who opposed the missionary society and instrumental music and (2) those who accepted both.



Division Was Inevitable

As these two groups developed, division was unavoidable. At the beginning of the movement, Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* in 1809 called for the unity of believers upon the teachings of the New Testament. Eighty years later, in 1889, another document – *An Address and Declaration* – was read at a gathering in Sand Creek, Illinois. Six thousand were in attendance, and following a sermon from Daniel Sommer in which he condemned innovations in the church, this document was read, calling for separation. The address concluded that because their brethren refused to give up their unauthorized innovations like the missionary society, they “can not and will not regard them as brethren” (*Address and Declaration*, published in the *Octographic Review*, September 5, 1889).

In 1906, for the first time, the U.S. Census recognized the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and churches of Christ as two separate groups. The Disciples of Christ embraced the innovations of the missionary society and instrumental music; the churches of Christ rejected them. Yet this was just when the U.S. government recognized the division. In reality, the separation happened much earlier than that due to two competing and incompatible views about how to use the New Testament to find the pattern for the work and worship of the church.

Summary

We began this study by noticing that Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). Those who are in His church are part of a kingdom “*which will never be destroyed*” (Daniel 2:44). When the Lord returns, He will “[hand] *over the kingdom to the God and Father*” (1 Corinthians 15:24).

In the meantime, sin and error continue to threaten the church. Just as Paul warned in the first century about “*the apostasy*” that was coming (2 Thessalonians 2:3), the cycle continues in which some (or many) fall away from the faith, and a remnant remains striving to be faithful to Christ who is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22).

Let us be encouraged by those in the past who sought to follow the pattern revealed in the New Testament. Let us also learn from the failings of those who departed from this pattern. In all things, let us strive to serve the Lord faithfully and unite with others who will do the same.

WE NEED GOD'S GUIDANCE

Despite receiving God's law and enjoying His blessings, God's people were forsaking Him. Like the nations around them, they were turning to idols that “*can do no harm, nor can they do any good*” (Jeremiah 10:5). By doing this, they were proving themselves to be “*altogether stupid and foolish*” (Jeremiah 10:8)

Why did the nations – and God's people – turn to idols? It seemed right to them. It satisfied their innate desire to worship while allowing themselves to go their own way.

While man *can* choose the direction he will go, there are disastrous consequences that come when we rely on human wisdom. Jeremiah said, “*I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps*” (Jeremiah 10:23).

We cannot find purpose or hope by looking to ourselves. We need to turn to God. Any attempt to find purpose and hope apart from Him is ultimately **m e a n i n g l e s s**. So remember that we need God's guidance. He has given us His word to show us the way we should go. Let's not rely on our own wisdom. Instead, let's submit to His will.

–Andy Sochor

BARBS WITH A POINT

Calling Names of False Teachers

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

At the beginning of his short epistle, Jude said Christians are to “*contend earnestly for the faith*” (Jude 3). This includes “*destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God*” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Therefore, of necessity, we must oppose false doctrine and those who teach error.

However, when it comes to identifying false teachers by name, there is disagreement among brethren about whether this is appropriate. Many believe we cannot label someone as a false teacher unless we go to that person first. Is that something we should be required to do?

Before answering that question, notice a few examples in the New Testament in which false teachers were identified *by name* so that brethren would be warned about the danger they posed:

“*Keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are **Hymenaeus** and **Alexander**, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme*” (1 Timothy 1:19-20).

“*But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are **Hymenaeus** and **Philetus**, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some*” (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

“*I wrote something to the church; but **Diotrephes**, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so*


and puts them out of the church” (3 John 9-10).

None of these examples suggest that the false teacher was approached privately before being identified publicly. Besides these, there is the instruction given to the Romans to “*mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*” (Romans 16:17, KJV). The only way to “*mark*” and “*avoid*” such men is to identify them by name. There may be times when it could be wise to approach them privately first (we will notice when this might be later), but this is never presented as a prerequisite to warning others about them.

Where do brethren get the idea that we first need to approach a false teacher privately before identifying him publicly? It is based on a misapplication of Matthew 18:15-17. Notice what Jesus said in that passage:

“*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector*” (Matthew 18:15-17).

In those verses, Jesus described a process in which we approach someone privately first, then take one or two others with us, then finally address the matter publicly. However, notice that Jesus was not talking about one who taught error *publicly*. Instead, He was addressing a situation in which a brother sins against us *personally*. (Some translations, such as the New King James Version, have the phrase, “*sins against*



you,” or something similar. However, even if that is not included in a particular English translation, we know it is implied because others have to be told about the sin being addressed; it is not publicly known.) Publicly teaching error is not equivalent to this. It is not a private matter for us to deal with privately at first. Jesus' instructions in this passage cannot apply to one who publicly teaches error; otherwise, the false teacher could refuse to meet with anyone who wanted to address his teaching and feel free to continue spreading his error without public opposition. That idea is absurd.

If someone publicly teaches false doctrine, it is not necessary to go to him *first* before refuting the error and identifying him. However, there is something else we need to do first – make sure we can *accurately* identify him as a false teacher.

Paul dealt with those who misrepresented his teaching. He told the saints in Rome, “*We are slanderously reported and...some claim that we say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'*” (Romans 3:8). He was describing certain individuals who attributed a position to him that he did not hold. Paul said this was a *slanderous* report. He used that same Greek word in his letter to Titus when he gave the instruction to “*malign no one*” (Titus 3:2). Yet too often, brethren, in their zeal to identify a “false teacher,” sin by slandering a brother in Christ because they are not *accurately* identifying his teaching.

So while we do not necessarily need to go to a false teacher before exposing him, we absolutely need to be sure we have our facts straight, lest we be guilty of making a false charge. Sadly, this happens far too often.

However, there may be times when we would want to go to someone before identifying him as a false

teacher.

§ If “brother so-and-so” told us someone is a false teacher, but we have no other proof, we would need to find out what he actually teaches rather than blindly trusting someone who may be sowing discord within the body of Christ.

§ If we may have misunderstood what someone taught, we need to get clarification.

§ If the teaching was done years ago and he may have changed his position, we would not want to label him as a false teacher for something he no longer believes or teaches.

Even in those cases, going to him is not a matter of *courtesy* but *accuracy*. False teachers need to be identified, exposed, and refuted. However, we need to make sure we are not making a false accusation. The Law of Moses stated, “*The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you*” (Deuteronomy 19:18-19). Of course, we are not under the old law today. Yet this shows us just how serious it is to make false accusations against our brethren. It is “*evil*” that we should “*purge...from among [us]*,” which would include marking and avoiding those who continue to cause division by repeating their slanderous false accusations (cf. Romans 16:17).

We need to be willing to defend the truth and refute error. But that does not allow us to stoop to dishonest, divisive, and lazy tactics. If “brother so-and-so” tells you that someone is a false teacher, make sure that is the case before repeating the charge yourself.

institutionalism

A Brief Reflection on Ezekiel 34: Faithful & Unfaithful Shepherds

By Rowland Femi Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

Introduction

Over the years, God has blessed me by working and interacting with many leaders in the Lord's Church in Nigeria, Canada, and the United States. I have seen the finest sides of these men as they serve in the vineyards of the Lord. However, as I read through Ezekiel 34, I do not want to assume that all shepherds are good leaders or faithful stewards of God's people, especially as evidenced by our text. Ezekiel 34 is a prophetic chapter where God, through the prophet, addresses the leaders of Israel, the shepherds.

The chapter strongly rebukes these leaders for failing to care for the people, likening them to shepherds who neglect their flock. Instead of tending to the needs of the sheep, these leaders have exploited and abandoned them, leading to their scattering and suffering. Indeed, while many leaders of God's people were shepherds whom God had entrusted with His flock, they were not necessarily good shepherds with a compassionate heart to lead in the right direction. Hence, those who took their responsibility lightly harmed the people of God.

Leadership Failure (34:4-6)

⁴ *The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.*

⁵ *So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.* ⁶ *My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them."*

The prophetic messages of Ezekiel revealed how the

leaders had failed their people by degrading them through bad leadership (cf. Ezekiel 19:1-14), which resulted in the exile of God's children from their land. Thus, to demonstrate the importance of good leadership, Ezekiel made a vivid comparison between the evil shepherds of the past and God, who would become their shepherd. God condemned the leaders for their selfishness and neglect. They had failed to care for the downtrodden, poor, oppressed, widows, and orphans (34: 4-6). These evil shepherds were compassionless, merciless, indifferent and cruel. Consequently, God told Ezekiel to rebuke the shepherds of His people for their transgressions (34:1-3).

God's Divine Intervention (34:11-16)

Verses 11-12: God's Initiative to Seek and Rescue

¹¹ *For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day."*

God declares that He will become the shepherd of His people. He will seek out the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak. God's intervention underscores His commitment to care for the children of Israel, thereby contrasting His faithful shepherding with the neglect of the human leaders.

Verses 13-14: Gathering and Providing for the Flock

¹³ *And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country.*

¹⁴ *I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be*



on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel."

The fact that God promised to restore and gather His people from all the places they have been scattered back to their land reveals God's unwavering care and protection of his children. Even when lost, God keeps seeking us to return to Him.

Verses 15-16: Healing and Justice

¹⁵ "I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord God. ¹⁶ "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment."

Indeed, God is the great shepherd! He always cares for the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 100:3). God promised to seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind the injured, and strengthen the weak. These traits highlight His compassion and commitment to healing and restoring His people because He does not want anyone to perish. Consequently, God visited His wrath upon the leaders of His people with justice and righteousness.

Lesson Derived: Call to Duty

By considering the responsibilities these leaders neglected, we can learn much about the work of elders as the shepherds of the Lord's Church today.

- I. Elders are to strengthen the spiritually sick and take the Lord's healing teaching to those diseased with sin (cf. Titus 1:9).
- II. They must bind up and encourage the broken and discouraged (Psalm 147:3).
- III. They must seek those who have left the body of Christ and lovingly lead them back to the safety of the Lord's Church (2 Thessalonians 3:10-15).
- IV. They should be zealous in seeking the lost,

recognizing that souls are precious in God's sight (Luke 15:15ff).

- V. Just as God promised to care for His people (Ezekiel 34:16), shepherds in the Lord's Church must seek to *bring back, bind up, and strengthen the weak* (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Those who refused to be kind to the people of God would encounter God's judgment (cf. Hebrews 13:7, 17).

Lesson Derived: Traits of a True Shepherd

Although Ezekiel did not discuss shepherds in the Lord's Church, we can apply the characteristics of these men in the Lord's Church today by how they care for the sheep.

- I. He puts his flock before himself. He does not live off the sheep; he lives for the sheep and is ready to lay down his life for the flock (1 Samuel 17:34-36).
- II. He wins souls at all costs (Luke 15:4-7; cf: 1 Corinthians 9:22).
- III. He acts with compassion toward those in trouble. When he sees a wounded lamb or sheep, he immediately cares for it, and with tender compassion, he binds up its wounds and restores them to life (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- IV. He sees that the flock is properly fed as he leads them from evil, not only by watching for wolves from without but also by protecting it against tragedy from within (Acts 20:30-31).
- V. He sees himself as doing the work of God because God is working through him as a steward- a superintendent for the Lord (cf. Titus 1:7; 2 Corinthians 5:20).
- VI. He recognizes that his responsibility is God's given and thus will account to God (Hebrews 13:7, 17).



Lesson Derived: Strong Leadership Needed

As seen in Ezekiel 34, God condemns the unfaithful shepherds of Israel and promises to shepherd His people Himself. This stresses the importance of leaders genuinely caring for and guiding their congregation, reflecting God's shepherding nature. God expects elders in the body of Christ to provide spiritual guidance and teaching, helping the congregation grow in their faith and understanding of God's Word. It is no accident that the Lord says, "Elders must be apt/able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:1). I love the way it was rendered in Titus 1:9, "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." It means God expects shepherds in His body to be men who love the Lord and hold tenaciously to the undiluted word of God.

Sometimes, elders assume that equipping the saints with the word is the responsibility of the evangelist/s only, but that is incorrect because shepherding connotes not only caring but also "*feeding*" and "*nurturing*" in the word of God. Apostle Paul emphasizes that leaders are given to the Church to equip the saints for the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12). Remarkably, leaders in the Lord's Church are to be examples of Christlike behaviour, demonstrating love, humility, and integrity. Peter urges elders to *shepherd the flock willingly and eagerly, not for personal gain, but as examples to the flock* (1 Peter 5:2-3). Therefore, one of the most crucial ways elders can lead by example is by demonstrating strong leadership in providing the congregation with the appropriate spiritual nourishment.

Conclusion

Ezekiel 34 serves as a powerful reminder of the sacred

duty of Church leaders to shepherd or feed their flock with love, care, and integrity, following the example of God Himself. When this is done, it brings about strong leadership vital for the health and growth of the Lord's Church. While Ezekiel 34 depicts God as a shepherd who loves, nurtures, feeds, and seeks the lost (Luke 19:10; John 3:14-16; 1 Timothy 1:15), still, it is man's responsibility to respond to God's call (cf. Isaiah 55:6; Matthew 7:7; Acts 2:37).

What a great example of Jesus we see as He demonstrated the ultimate care in being our good shepherd by being willing to lay down His life for the sheep (John 10:15-18; 1 John 3:16). Therefore, it is incumbent to understand that as the Lord places men in authority in His Church, God expects them to lead honourably. He will hold accountable leaders who fail in their God's given responsibility to His people (2 Timothy 4:1-5). Good leaders care for the whole flock despite its varied problems and weaknesses. Hence, wise leaders address every one of those needs as a good shepherd would to his flock (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Elders are the shepherds of God's flock today (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17). They, in particular, are to watch over and care for the congregation's souls because God will hold them responsible for people's souls.

Is Water Baptism A Swimming Exercise?

Continued from pg. 6

Conclusion

Pastor Abel Damina's position on baptism is false and misleading as we have seen from the scriptures. Anyone that is conscious of going to heaven must reject his teaching and follow the Bible. False doctrines put people's lives at risk as it makes worship to be in vain (Matthew 15:8-9; II John 9). Will you follow the Bible or Pastor Abel Damina?

Myth Buster

Christmas – Separating Truth From Fiction

By Jarrod M. Jacobs | Indiana, USA

Every December, folks in the world over engage in perpetuating a myth. This myth is the so-called “Christmas Story.” This myth says that Jesus Christ was born on December 25th to a virgin named Mary and her husband, Joseph. They tried to get a room in Bethlehem, but there was no room for them in the inn. Thus, she had her baby in a stable and laid him in a manger. Soon after, three wise men and some shepherds, who had been following a special star, appeared to worship the Christ-child. Jesus came to bring peace to the nations. Therefore, all of humanity needs to stop on December 25th to worship God and remember the birth of the Christ-child. Honoring Him can include singing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus, offering a prayer, or any religiously-minded thing one would like to do in His honor.

The above paragraph, while containing some basic facts, also includes elements that are not biblically accurate. For instance, the fact that Jesus was born into this world is true (**Matt. 1; Lk. 2**). His mother was a virgin named Mary (**Isa. 7:14; Lk. 1:26-35**), and she was married to a man named Joseph (**Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:27**). Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days when Rome ruled the world (**Matt. 2:1; Lk. 2:1-7**), and He would eventually die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world (**Jn. 1:29**). Other elements in the paragraph are not right and it is crucial for us to separate truth from the myths that have been perpetuated over the years.

The myth begins with the details beyond this fundamental truth of Christ's birth. Sadly, many have fallen for this fantasy. What do I mean by “myth” and “fantasy”? Let us look closely at what men call the “Christmas story” and see what myths are told today. It is our responsibility as believers to discern truth from myth and to ensure that our understanding of

the Christmas story is rooted in biblical accuracy.

Myth #1: Calling The Event Of Christ's Birth The “Christmas Story.”

TRUTH: “Christmas” is an Old English word that means “The Mass of Christ.” It had its beginnings not with the Bible but with the Catholic church. Looking back into history, we find that “there is no month of the year not assigned by some writer as that of Christ's birth.” [1] Historical studies also show that the birth of Christ was not celebrated until the 3rd or 4th century. [2] In other words, this celebration did not originate in the New Testament! Celebrating Christ's birthday was not taught nor practiced by the apostles. It began centuries after the apostles died.

The Catholic Church decided to celebrate a birthday for Christ on December 25th. This decision was made by Liberius, a bishop in the Catholic Church (considered by Catholics to be one of the early Catholic popes), who ordered December 25th to be adopted as the date for the celebration of the birth of Christ in the year 354 A.D. The choice of this date was influenced by the fact that December 25th was already a festive day for the sun god Mithra and appealed to the Christians as an appropriate date to commemorate the birth of Jesus, the “Light of the World.” [4]

Myth #2: Jesus Was Born On December 25th.

TRUTH: The exact day of Christ's birth was never revealed by God. As we saw above, the Roman Catholics declared December 25th as Christ's birthday. However, when studying Scripture, the only clue we are given concerning a time of year for the Lord's birth is the record Luke gives us when he speaks of the time of taxing or census that the Romans did, as well as the fact that the shepherds were in the fields in

this time of year (Lk. 2:1-8). Based on these facts, some have conjectured that Christ's birth was in the spring rather than December. Nevertheless, anyone who wishes to state with any certainty what day Christ was born is perpetuating a myth. God never revealed this aspect of Christ's life on earth (Deut. 29:29; I Pet. 4:11).

Myth #3: The Shepherds Followed A Star To Find Jesus.

Some teach us that all parties interested in finding Christ followed a star to find Jesus the night He was born.

TRUTH: The shepherds were not even looking for the Messiah when they were told Christ was born “*in the city of David.*” They were busy watching their flock. The angels said that to find the Messiah, they needed to find a baby lying in a manger and “*wrapped in swaddling clothes*” (Lk. 2:11-12). After this visit from the angels, the shepherds went to find the Christ and found Him as the angel had said (Lk. 2:15-17). The shepherds, though, never followed a star to find the Lord.

Myth #4: The Wise Men Saw Jesus On The Night He Was Born.

Generally, on any “Christmas Card,” T.V. ad, billboard, etc., one sees in December, the “Nativity scene” is the same. They will depict the shepherds and wise men together visiting the Lord Jesus on the night of His birth.

TRUTH: The shepherds were there the night of Christ's birth (Lk. 2:8-17). The wise men, however, were not present that night. The Bible reveals that the wise men were not present until some time after His birth.

Just like the exact date of Christ's birth, the actual day the wise men visited Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is unknown. What we know is that these wise men

followed a star to find the Messiah (Matt. 2:2). However, they went to Jerusalem instead of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1). When they went to Jerusalem and inquired about the “*King of the Jews,*” they met Herod who had interest about His birth until he perceived the “threat” from a King (Matt. 2:2-4)! The wise men and scribes told Herod about the prophecy of a coming Messiah, and then the wise men told Herod when they had first seen the star in the sky (Matt. 2:7).

Further evidence of these wise men not arriving on the exact day of Christ's birth is seen when we find the wise men going to Bethlehem and following the star to the “*house*” where Christ and His parents were (Matt. 2:11). Note these folks were not with the animals anymore. Jesus was not lying in a manger or feed trough. They were in a house in Bethlehem. Chronologically, Joseph and Mary had already taken Jesus to Jerusalem by this time and had already seen Simeon and Anna (Lk. 2:22-38). Thus, he is older than forty days (Lev. 12:2-6). Men like brother J.W. McGarvey have suggested that six months had elapsed since the star had appeared.^[5] Another reason for this explanation is due to the nature of Herod's edict when he commanded baby boys “*two years old and under*” be killed (Matt. 2:16). If the wise men were present the night of Christ's birth, all that was necessary was for Herod to kill all the newborns. For Herod to pass such an edict means the wise men must have arrived later than His birth to worship Christ (Matt. 2:2).

Myth #5: There Were Three Wise Men.

TRUTH: This is perhaps the most well-known and universally accepted myth surrounding the birth of Christ. Folks read about the three gifts the wise men brought (gold, frankincense, myrrh) and assume that only three men were present (Matt. 2:11). Some have gone so far as to name the wise men who visited

Christ! Again, their names are unknown in the Bible. It is a pretty broad assumption to conclude that Jesus receiving three kinds of gifts means only three wise men were present! The only thing we know is that there was a plurality of wise men who came to worship Jesus at Bethlehem (**Matt. 2:2, 11**).

Myth #6: Jesus Came To Bring World Peace.

When the shepherds saw the angels, they heard these words of exaltation and praise: “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*” (**Lk. 2:14**). Was this a declaration that Christ came to bring peace between nations? If it is, then Christ has failed miserably at this work! Furthermore, Christ said, “*I have not come to bring peace, but a sword*” (**Matt. 10:34**). So, which is it? Did He come to bring peace, as the angels said, or to bring a sword, as He said?

TRUTH: These statements are not contradictory. The peace under discussion was not peace between men but between God and man. **Ephesians 2:15** declares Christ made peace when He broke down the “*middle wall of partition.*” The peace of **Luke 2** was not promised to be seen in physical nations, but it is enjoyed on a spiritual level. Yes, peaceful coexistence is possible between men and nations (**Col. 3:11; Rom. 12:18**). However, this happens when we are at peace with God first! This is what Christ came to establish, not necessarily peace between nations of men.

Myth #7: Christ Wants Us To Celebrate His Birthday.

To suggest that Christ does not want His birthday celebrated is almost “anathema” in some circles. Yet, there is nowhere in Scripture where Christ or the apostles stated or implied that Christ's birthday is to be celebrated.

TRUTH: All the things necessary for pleasing God today have been revealed in Scripture (**2 Tim 3:16-**

17; 2 Pet. 1:3; 1 Pet. 4:11; etc.). A simple perusal of Scripture will show that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is what the New Testament continually emphasizes. Seeing that Christians are people who act according to what God has revealed (**1 Pet. 4:11**), then we need to reject any teaching or practice that has not been revealed in Scripture (**Deut. 29:29**). The day of Christ's birth, a need for celebrating such, etc., are things which God has not revealed. Therefore, let us stop perpetuating these myths!

Myth #8: Mary Is A Perpetual Virgin.

While we note the Catholic origins and various myths behind a religious observance of the “Christmas Story,” we must also mention the false doctrine related to Christ's birth, where some say that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Yes, many deny Mary had any other children after Jesus.

TRUTH: Mary did not remain a virgin. She had several more children after her first-born Son, Jesus (**Lk. 2:7**), was born.

Matthew 13:55-56 records an occasion when the people listening to Him were “astonished” (**Matt. 13:54**). At this, they asked, “*Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?*” Note that in this short section, the people named four brothers Christ had and spoke of Him having a plurality of sisters! **Matthew 12:46** also speaks of Christ's mother and brothers.

No, Mary was not a “perpetual virgin.” She had several other children, in addition to her eldest, Jesus.

Conclusion

Indeed, we could name other myths associated with the birth of Christ. Yet, I hope these will help open our eyes to the truth. I write these things not to diminish the glory, beauty, and truth concerning Christ's birth. Instead, I have written to help us put things in perspective. Let us be satisfied with what God has said and not delve into areas where God has been silent (**Deut. 29:29; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11**)!

The birth of Christ takes its place as the most extraordinary event in mankind's history. Think about it: The birth of Christ has touched the lives of men in so many ways that we even keep time on our calendar based on His birth! Yet, we need to understand that the birth of Christ means nothing if He did not die on the cross! If our Lord had died a "natural death," if He had died of "old age and complications," then His birth would have meant nothing. It is because of our Lord's sacrificial death on the cross that His birth has meaning. As Jesus stood falsely accused before Pilate, facing an unjust and cruel death at the hands of sinners, He said, "*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears my voice*" (**Jn. 18:36**). The angels and men of earth celebrated His birth because of what He was going to do, i.e. die as a sacrifice for men, and bring salvation to all (**Lk. 2:28-35, 36-38**). Even if men did not completely understand this at the time (**Matt. 16:21-22**), this was the purpose of celebrating His birth by the angels. The "peace," the "goodwill," etc. (**Lk. 2:14**) is realized by those who are Christians! Since this is true, we find repeated emphasis in the New Testament not upon Christ's birth but on His death for all mankind. Remembering the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is what is revealed and emphasized in the Scriptures (**Matt.**

26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:24-25; Rom. 6:3-6, 16-18; etc.), but observing His birth religiously (on December 25th, or any day of the year) is not!

PRAY AT THE PROPER TIME

Zechariah prophesied of the future prosperity and deliverance of God's people. Much of this was tied to the coming of Christ (the Messiah). Despite the oppression they faced from outside forces, they could look forward to peace.

Regarding His plan to bless them, God said, "*Ask rain from the Lord at the time of the spring rain—the Lord who makes the storm clouds; and He will give them showers of rain, vegetation in the field of each man*" (Zechariah 10:1). They would enjoy the physical blessings of this life that God was able to provide.

However, it is interesting to note *when* God said they were to offer this prayer – "*at the time of the spring rain.*" This was not about asking for a miracle; it was about recognizing their dependence upon God and His provisions.

We know that God has the power to do more than we could imagine. Paul said He is "*able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think*" (Ephesians 3:20). Yet this does not mean we should expect God to perform a miracle every time we pray. Instead, we need to trust in God and what He has promised to provide.

So pray at the proper time. Our faith in God should not depend on Him doing the miraculous to satisfy our needs whenever *we* desire. Instead, we need to be thankful for the blessings He has provided and pray that His kindness to us might continue to be manifested.

–Andy Sochor

IDEAL HOME

Ahab and Jezebel – The Couple Who Hurt Each Other and Everyone Around Them

By Chris Reeves | Tennessee, USA

Synopsis: A God-given marriage has a great potential for good. Yet, some couples choose to allow their marriage to be a force for evil. Like Ahab and Jezebel, they ruin their God-given relationship and end up hurting themselves and everyone around them.

Introduction

Believe it or not, about twelve years ago, I actually met a young woman named Jezebel. She was working the counter at the Arby's in Springfield, Tennessee. After that, I wondered if her mother knew the biblical account of Jezebel and why she would give her daughter that name. The names of Ahab and Jezebel in the Old Testament, of course, are synonymous with wickedness and worldliness. They were pure evil [Note #1].

Even today in the Lord's church, couples can do damage to themselves and those around them. Married couples should ask, "Are we helping each other and those around us reach heaven, or are we leading ourselves and others down a path of sin?" Of course, all couples that I know of would say, "We are helping each other and those around us!" Are you really? Take an honest look at your thoughts, actions, habits, lifestyle, influence, teaching, etc. Are these things really biblical, or are they more carnally and worldly minded? Are we truly living by biblical principles, or are we selfishly living as we wish, merely appearing to be Christians?

They Hurt Themselves

Ahab holds the dishonorable distinction of being Israel's most wicked king to date. Contrary to God's word, he married Jezebel, a Sidonian. Together, they encouraged each other in wickedness, harming themselves. She dominated him and he acquiesced to her influence. She moved him to promote gross idolatry and immorality in Israel. Because of this, he sold himself to do evil (1 Kings 21:20). 1 Kings 16:31-

33 reads:

"And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made the Asherah; and Ahab did yet more to provoke Jehovah, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him".

When Ahab coveted Naboth's adjoining vineyard, Naboth refused to sell it [Note #2]. Ahab, acting childishly, was displeased and discouraged and he would not eat. Instead of telling her husband to stop pouting, Jezebel told Ahab that she would get the vineyard for him. She had Naboth falsely accused and then killed, so Ahab got his vineyard. Elijah came and pronounced judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel for their wicked deed. Then, the author of the book reminds the reader of Jezebel's evil influence over her husband. 1 Kings 21:25 reads:

"But there was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to do that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up".

They Hurt God's People

Ahab and Jezebel hurt God's people by causing them to commit idolatry. Ahab and Jezebel provoked the Lord to anger and "made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 21:22). Their evil influence in Israel would extend about 200 years all the way down to the time of Micah (Micah 6:16).



They Hurt the Preaching of God's Word.

Ahab and Jezebel hurt the preaching of God's word by killing the true prophets and by supporting the false prophets of Baal. Jezebel “cut off” and “slew” the prophets of Jehovah (1 Kings 18:4, 13). In place of the true prophets, Jezebel supported 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who ate at her table (1 Kings 18:19). When Jezebel promised to kill Elijah, he had to run away (1 Kings 19:2). Ahab also did not like Elijah. Ahab called him the “troubler of Israel” (1 Kings 18:17) and “mine enemy” (1 Kings 21:20). Ahab also disliked the prophet Micaiah because he never prophesied good about the king, so Ahab imprisoned him (1 Kings 22:8). About fourteen years after the death of Ahab, the Lord would use Jehu to slay Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and Jezebel because she had shed the blood of the Lord's prophets and servants (2 Kings 9:7, 30-37).

They Hurt Their Children

Ahab and Jezebel were an evil influence on their children. Their son, Ahaziah, was a wicked king who ruled over Israel for only two years. 1 Kings 22:52-53 reads:

And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, wherein he made Israel to sin. And he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger Jehovah, the God of Israel, according to all that his father had done.

On one occasion, Ahaziah took a serious fall and got sick. Instead of turning to the Lord for help, he sent his messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether or not he would recover. Elijah told the king that he would die in his sickness because he refused to seek the one, true God of Israel (2 Kings 1:1-18). The second son of Ahab and Jezebel, Jehoram

(Joram), was wicked and ruled over Israel for twelve years. Jehu summed up his reign this way in 2 Kings 9:22:

And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” And he answered, “What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?”

The daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, Athaliah, was also wicked [Note #3]. She is called “that wicked woman” in 2 Chronicles 24:7. She married Jehoram, who became king of Judah and he was as wicked as she was. She influenced Judah to the south to do evil. 2 Chronicles 21:6 reads:

And he [Jehoram] walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah.

Athaliah also counseled her son, Ahaziah, king of Judah, to do evil. 2 Chronicles 22:2-4 reads:

...his mother's name was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, as did the house of Ahab; for they were his counsellors after the death of his father, to his destruction.

When Jehu killed Ahaziah, Athaliah seized the throne by murdering all her grandsons except Joash. She ruled as queen for six years until Joash was made the rightful king and she was slain (2 Kings 11:1-20).

Conclusion

Married couples have to decide if they will follow biblical principles and help others, or follow their self-will and hurt others. Unfortunately, the hard truth of the matter is that there are couples in the Lord's church today, like Ahab and Jezebel or Ananias and Sapphira, who are hurting themselves and others.



Some couples engage in immorality (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Some form cliques (Gal. 5:20). Some are negative naysayers, discouragers, and backbiters (Rom. 1:30). Some are divisive and cantankerous (Titus 3:9-10). Some stir up strife (Prov. 10:12). Some manifest selfish ambition (Phil. 2:3). Some are self-willed (2 Pet. 2:10), lovers of self, unloving and unforgiving (2 Tim. 3:2-3). Some are domineering over others (3 John 9-11), etc.

Maybe you have witnessed this in your local church or one nearby. When couples act this way, they hurt themselves and others around them. Yes, they call themselves “Christians.” They claim that they are “standing for the truth.” They believe that they have “sacrificed for the church for many years” as preachers, elders, deacons, Bible class teachers, etc. They believe that they are always “right” when others are wrong. They say they are “doing what’s best for others.” They think that they “deserve” to act this way and they are “entitled” to their behavior. In reality, acting this way only hurts themselves and others.

Brethren, we can do better than this. We can use our God-given marriages to bless ourselves and others, not hurt ourselves and others. Remember, true love for our mate, our family, and our brethren must always be “without hypocrisy” (Rom. 12:9) and must never “seek its own” (1 Cor. 13:5) [Note #4]. When you choose a mate, select one who is godly, one who will act maturely, one who will obey God’s word, one who will respect the roles of marriage, and one who will treat others properly.

Applications for Today

Newlyweds

Those of you who are just now married, please make a commitment to always live by biblical principles. Stand on your own two spiritual feet. Be willing to be different if you have to—different from your parents,

friends, the world, etc. Make a commitment to never hurt yourselves with sin or be the cause of hurting others around you. From the start, use your marriage as a force for good and strive to be a blessing for others.

Mid-lifers

Those of you who have been married many years may need to reassess your marriage and see if you are actually the cause of hurt in others. Honestly ask yourselves: “Are we the ones causing the problems in the local church?” “Are we the ones at odds with the preacher or elders for no good reason?” “Are we the ones who are setting the wrong example for our children?”

Golden-agers

Those of you who have been married most of your life, you can be the ones who show how to help others, not hurt others. You can talk with couples younger than yourselves and tell them what they can do to help themselves and others.

Notes

[Note #1] In the New Testament, Jezebel was the wicked and worldly woman in the church at Thyatira who seduced Christians to commit fornication (Rev. 2:20).

[Note #2] Naboth was simply following the law of Moses as found in Leviticus 25:23.

[Note #3] In 2 Kings 8:26, Athaliah is described in some translations as the “daughter of Omri, king of Israel.” This, of course, should be read as the “granddaughter” of Omri (see NIV, ESV, NKJV, etc.).

[Note #4] I find it quite ironic that the “love passage” of 1 Corinthians 13, often read during a wedding ceremony, is the very passage that is violated later during the marriage.

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SALVATION

The End Times: A Call to Faithfulness

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

Introduction

Conversations about the end times often ignite a mix of fascination, fear, and speculation. Whenever we see headlines about wars, pandemics, political instability, and even natural disasters, we often see accompanying declarations that “the end is near.” It is important to examine what Scripture truly says to separate fact from fiction and avoid being swayed by sensationalism.

Does the Bible actually specify signs of the end times?

The question of whether the Bible provides clear signs of the end times often leads to debates and misinterpretations. A key passage that frequently surfaces in these discussions is Matthew 24. Many interpret this chapter as a roadmap to identifying the specific signs of Christ's Second Coming and the end of the world. However, a careful study of this passage is required.

In Matthew 24, Jesus responds to a two-part question from His disciples (Verse 3). 1. “When will this happen?” (referring to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, mentioned in verse 2) 2. “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Much of the chapter is devoted to the first question. Jesus prophesies about events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. For instance, He describes false messiahs (v. 5), wars and rumors of wars (v. 6), famines, earthquakes, and persecution (vv. 7–9). While these events sound apocalyptic, Jesus clarifies in verse 34: *“Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened.”* The term “this generation” clearly points to the audience of His time, suggesting that much of what Jesus describes pertains to the events

surrounding the fall of Jerusalem.

When Jesus transitioned to discussing His Second Coming, Jesus did not provide signs, but makes it clear that no one can predict the exact time of His return: *“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”* (Matthew 24:36). Rather than providing a checklist of events to identify the end, Jesus emphasizes readiness and vigilance. He compares His coming to the days of Noah, where people were caught unaware (vv. 37–39). He urges followers to “keep watch” and live faithfully, knowing His return will be sudden and unexpected (vv. 42–44).

What Should Christians Focus On?

Rather than obsessing over whether specific events indicate the end, believers are called to live lives of readiness and faithfulness. The Bible emphasizes spiritual preparedness over speculation.

1. Be Spiritually Alert: The scriptures encourages us to be conscious of our spiritual state. Being spiritually alert means more than simply waiting for signs, it requires active engagement in faith. Faith implies cultivating trust in God regardless of circumstances. To demonstrate faith, we are also encouraged to live in obedience to God's word. This involves aligning our daily life with Biblical teachings and avoiding distractions that pull attention away from God. Furthermore, Prayer and meditation on the Scriptures are important as well. Through these practices, Christians maintain their spiritual connection with God and grow in wisdom and discernment. Remember, spiritual alertness is not about paranoia or fear but about maintaining a posture of expectation and hope.

2. Proclaim the Gospel: Jesus made it clear that the



Gospel must be preached to all nations (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20). Sharing the message of salvation is not only a sign of readiness but also a direct command from Christ. Believers are tasked with actively sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. And even more important is the fact that living a life that reflects Christ's love and truth is a powerful way to proclaim the Gospel. Actions often speak louder than words. Proclaiming the Gospel shifts the focus from fear of the future to fulfilling God's mission in the present.

3. Practice Holiness: Peter's exhortation in 2 Peter 3:10–12 calls believers to holy and godly living as they await Christ's return. Holiness is not about perfection but about intentionality in aligning one's life with God's will. Holiness begins in the heart. It involves daily repentance, surrendering sinful habits, and seeking to grow in Christ-like character. Holiness means being distinct from the world's values and priorities. Living a holy life demonstrates faith in God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. It reflects a heart prepared to meet the Lord.

4. Comfort One Another: Paul reminds us that Jesus' return should bring comfort and hope, not fear (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Christians are called to encourage one another. This fellowship also helps us in our preparation for the coming of Christ. Through reminding each other of God's sovereignty and promises, we can help alleviate fear and doubt and help others who are weak. Moreover, comforting one another not only strengthens the body of Christ but also serves as a witness to the world of the peace that comes from faith in Jesus.

Focusing on these four areas equips Christians to live faithfully while awaiting Christ's return. Instead of being preoccupied with predicting the end, believers can actively participate in God's work, grow in their

faith, and encourage one another. Ultimately, readiness for the coming of Christ is not about watching the clock but about walking closely with God, loving others, and fulfilling the Great Commission. When we live this way, we embody the hope and assurance that Jesus will come again, just as He promised.

Conclusion

Instead of asking, "When will the end come?" the better question is, "Am I ready for Christ's return?" Living in spiritual readiness involves faith, hope, and love. The Second Coming of Christ is not meant to fill us with fear but to inspire us to live with purpose, looking forward to the day when Jesus will return and make all things new.

BIBLE VERSES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

1. "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me." — Psalm 28:7
2. "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." — 1 Peter 5:7
3. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." — Philippians 4:13
4. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." — Isaiah 41:10
5. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." — Lamentations 3:22-23
6. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." — Psalm 34:18
7. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." — Matthew 11:28
8. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." — Romans 8:28

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is Baptism a symbol?

By Terry Wane Benton

Statement:

“Jesus' blood saves us. It has nothing to do with baptism. Water baptism is symbolic of what happens to us when our sins are washed away by His blood.”

Answer:

Why do we need a symbol? If the real thing happened, it happened. How does baptism have any value if it is just a symbol of what has already happened inside? Where does the Bible say that baptism is a symbol? When the 3,000 asked, “*What shall we do?*” ([Acts 2:37](#)), did Peter say, “Repent, and let every one of you show a symbol of baptism that you already have remission of sins?” ([Acts 2:38](#)).

If they were already saved and baptism was just a symbol, why did Peter continue with many other words exhorting them, saying, “*Be saved from this perverse generation?*” ([Acts 2:40-41](#)).

No! Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is “*for remission of sins*”, not “for a symbol that you already have remission of sins.” If they were already saved, there was no need to exhort them to “*be saved from this perverse generation*” ([Acts 2:40](#)).

Was Saul (Paul) told to “Arise, and wash away your sins, and then show the symbol of that by being baptized?” ([Acts 22:16](#)). No! He was told to “arise, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Baptism is involved in both cases as the real moment of having remission of sins.

Peter said baptism is not the symbol but the real or “antitype” ([1 Peter 3:21 NKJV](#)). The salvation from the flood was the symbol or type, and the antitype to that was baptism. The antitype is the real, the figure that illustrated it was the waters that washed away a sinful world by the flood saving Noah and his family from that sinful world.

There is a “*form*” involved in baptism. We are “*buried with Him*” in baptism, and we are raised up together with Him ([Romans 6:1-6,16-17](#)). Consider it this way: the 3,000 on Pentecost and Saul in [Acts 22:16](#) each died to sin, were buried with Christ in baptism, and rose to walk in newness of life. But baptism was not a symbol that they already had their sins washed away and already had “newness of life.” Baptism was when they united with Christ; the blood of Christ was applied to them, and therefore, the moment they could rise to walk in the newness of life. Jesus' blood does the washing, but **when** does the blood apply to us and wash away our sins? In baptism, that is done with repentance in the name of Jesus Christ!

The above quote is a common thought, but it is not biblical thought. No doubt that baptism would do nothing apart from the blood of Christ, but there is a moment when Jesus' blood washes our sins. Paul says we have faith in the operation of God that He will cut our sins away when we are “*buried with Him in baptism*” ([Colossians 2:12](#)). The moment God cuts our sins away is when faith leads us to “*repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins*” ([Acts 2:38](#)). The only symbol shown in baptism is death, burial, and resurrection. We conform to His death, burial, and resurrection by dying to sin, being buried with Him in baptism, and rising to walk in the newness of life. The newness of life comes after baptism, not before baptism. Those things happen **in** baptism, not before baptism. We all need to return to Bible teaching and practice!



Addendum

An Uncomfortable Preacher

By Dylan Stewart | Alabama, USA

Recently, I listened to a recorded sermon preached on Calvinism by a gospel preacher local to my area. A few minutes into the Sunday sermon, the preacher stated, "I'm always a little hesitant to talk about things of this nature [Calvinism] in an assembly like this, and the reason for that is there are times when there may be those with us who very much believe these ideas [TULIP]." This statement is one that concerns me, and the attitudes behind this statement seem to be more prevalent among gospel preachers today than in years past. Allow me to express why statements such as this are so concerning.

Treating the Church Services as More "Sacred" than God Does

Since I became a Christian in 2012, I have discovered that many gospel preachers are uncomfortable preaching on certain subjects specifically within the **church assembly**. For example, most gospel preachers, regardless of their position on some of the more "controversial" issues within the brotherhood (you probably know the issues I'm talking about without me expressly stating them), refuse to preach on those issues within the assembly with any frequency that remotely mirrors the frequency in which they preach on other more "agreeable" subjects. A large number of preachers refrain from discussing the more "controversial" subjects within the assemblies because they view the church services as a time that is solely meant to focus on things that unify the congregation (**NOTE:** This conclusion is not me evilly surmising. I have had conversations with gospel preachers who have expressed almost verbatim what I have stated here). Many Christians share this attitude even though there is not one single scripture that supports the notion that the worship services must

not be used to focus on sorting through doctrinal differences. In fact, the scriptures teach the **exact opposite** - we have approved examples proving to the contrary that the assemblies are a perfect time/place to sort through doctrinal issues. The church services are designed by God to do much more than provide Christians an opportunity to sing, pray, hear a sermon, partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, and collect the weekly contribution. Other activities that God authorizes the church services be used for include:

- Reporting on Evangelism - "**Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles**" (Acts 14:27).
- Arranging Benevolence for Needy Saints - "**Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'** And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles" (Acts 6:1-6).



- Disciplining Erring Brethren - **"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you . . . In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"** (1 Corinthians 5:1-5).
- Addressing Doctrinal Issues - **"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them"** (Acts 15:1-4).

Did you notice that last point? The church services are, in fact, approved by God as a suitable occasion for a congregation to work through its doctrinal differences. Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable to preach on "controversial" subjects within the worship services. No Christian should see the assemblies as so "sacred" that we somehow are not permitted to preach/teach on "controversial" matters within the church services. The whole counsel of God must be preached (Acts 20:27). If preaching the gospel makes people uncomfortable - well, to put it bluntly - that problem is on the listener and is not the fault of the

one bringing the message of truth. If a church is filled with people who refuse to listen to the whole counsel of God being taught, that says a lot about those people, and it does not say anything good (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

An Unwillingness to Preach What is Needed to Those Who Need to Hear It

Sadly, many gospel preachers are comfortable preaching the whole counsel of God but only as long as those who are caught up in sin and follow false doctrines are not actually in their midst. They have strong backbones when "preaching to the choir" but lose their backbones when presented with a very real opportunity to possibly "**persuade**" (2 Corinthians 5:11) or "**warn**" (Acts 20:31) someone who is in error. That is simply shameful! Such preachers really fit the mold of the false accusations that a few Corinthians levied at Paul. They accused him of acting "**weighty and powerful**" in his writings while looking and acting very differently in person (2 Corinthians 10:10), leading Paul to state to the contrary, "**Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present**" (2 Corinthians 11:11, ESV). What good does it do to preach on Calvinism (or any other false doctrine) only to people who recognize the numerous errors riddled throughout that false doctrine? Why would any gospel preacher purposely refrain from preaching on something that someone in their midst needs to hear? There may eventually come a time when the preacher needs to shake the dust off his feet (Matthew 10:14) and move on to a different subject (or possibly even leave a congregation), but it seems that many preachers are more comfortable shaking the dust off their feet BEFORE they ever teach what needs to be heard. To draw a scriptural parallel, what if John the Baptist went all over Judea and Jerusalem preaching



against unlawful marriages but, when presented the opportunity to teach Herod and Herodias, he decided to refrain from preaching on the subject? He likely would have lived a few years longer (Mark 6:16-18), but he also would have been a coward for not teaching the truth to someone who needed to hear it. Even worse, he would have been guilty of watering down the gospel (2 Corinthians 2:17). Thankfully, John did not do what some gospel preachers today do and refrain from emphasizing things that need to be preached, even within the assembly; instead he preached the truth regardless of the consequences.

Neglecting Key Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of a gospel preacher to "**convince** [reprove, KJV], **rebuke, and exhort**" (2 Timothy 4:2). We must not ignore the charges to convince and rebuke just because it makes us uncomfortable or potentially might make others uncomfortable. In fact, neglecting the responsibility to openly reprove and expose false doctrine, error, and sin (Ephesians 5:11) is exactly what 2 Timothy 4:1-4 condemns: "**I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.**" Sometimes, our audience needs to be made uncomfortable. No preacher should glory or revel in the fact that they must correct people; no preacher should ever rejoice in the fact that there might be people in the assembly who cling to a false doctrine or are continuing in sin

which puts them in danger of eternal punishment; but neither should any preacher comfortably preach on subjects when those people are not in our presence, then refrain from preaching on those same subjects whenever said people come around us. In effect, Peter exemplified the same type of self-preservation when he first distanced himself from Jesus (Luke 22:54) before openly denying Him (Luke 22:55-62). Does any gospel preacher want to be known as the Peter of Luke 22? Personally, I would much prefer being compared to the Peter of Acts 2 who called sinners who did not understand the gospel of Christ to repentance, come what may.

Conclusion

I encourage all men who stand up in the pulpit to "**do the work of an evangelist**" (2 Timothy 4:5), and do it in its entirety. I am very thankful for the good men I have been associated with in my life who have faithfully and painstakingly performed this amazing work. Yet, we do the gospel a disservice and we withhold food from the souls of people who spiritually hunger when we treat the church services as more "sacred" than God does, neglect preaching on subjects our audience needs to hear, and forget our responsibilities to reprove, rebuke, and exhort in a loving way. Souls are dependent on preachers doing the full extent of their divinely defined work!