

# The Whole Counsel of God

MAY 2026 | VOLUME 3 | NUMBER 5

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“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.  
For I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.”

Acts 20:26-27 NKJV

## From the Editor's Desk

DYLAN STEWART - 01 MAY 2026

It is with great joy that we present the fifth edition in our third volume of *The Whole Counsel of God*.

In this month's edition of the journal, we have only two primary articles for your consideration. Both articles emphasize the importance of honesty, consistency, and conviction in our faith.

The first article, "*Why Some Unbelievers Reject Christianity*," examines the unfortunate reality that believers themselves can sometimes contribute to the unbelief of non-Christians. It is my prayer that this article will challenge us to examine ourselves and make sure that we are not placing unnecessary stumbling blocks in the paths of those who have not yet taken up their crosses to follow Christ.

The second article is a combined version of four articles asking the question, "*Why Do You Believe...?*" This study encourages readers to carefully examine the reasons why we believe and practice the things that we do in religion. The article urges us to put our beliefs to the test to make sure all that we believe and practice can be defended with book, chapter, and verse (**Col. 3:17**).

I hope these articles encourage us to think seriously about both our influence and our convictions. It is not enough to claim we believe the truth. We must also be willing to examine ourselves (**2 Cor. 13:5**), handle scriptures honestly (**2 Tim. 2:15**), and live in a way which honors the gospel that we carry into the world (**Phil. 1:27**).

Thank you for all the encouragement that you provide, both in our communications with each other and in how you strive to live faithfully in service to our Lord. May God continue to bless you, use you as a tool for good in this world, and keep you in His care and under His loving provision.

(DTS)



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# Why Some Unbelievers Reject Christianity

DYLAN STEWART | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

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Christians often wonder why so many people reject the gospel. Oftentimes, the issue is due to the unbeliever not willing to believe things that can only be accepted and explained by faith. The issue also often stems from hearts hardened by sin. However, there is also a sad reality that believers are often partly responsible for unbelievers rejecting the gospel. Unbelievers observe the behavior of Christians, and when how we live does not match what we preach, it causes some unbelievers to reject Christianity altogether. Consider several examples demonstrating how believers can prevent unbelievers from coming to Christ.

## REPENTANCE THAT DOESN'T MAKE THINGS RIGHT

One reason Christianity gets a bad name among unbelievers is because they assume Christians think we can live however we want, sin however we please, then simply ask God for forgiveness and everything automatically gets erased. Many unbelievers have this assumption because countless believers operate under that false premise.

It is true that confessing our sins to God is necessary for Christians to obtain for-

giveness when we sin. God's word plainly says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*" (1 John 1:9). However, biblical forgiveness demands much more than just asking God to forgive us. When a Christian sins against someone else, forgiveness from God requires making things right with the person who was wronged. Paul spoke of true repentance producing actions which will "*clear*" oneself from any charges of wrongdoing (2 Cor. 7:11). In other words, repentance does not simply confess wrongs; it also takes necessary actions that will influence others to forgive us of those wrongs.

Consider the example of Zacchaeus. When he encountered Jesus, he did not merely say, "Lord, forgive me." Instead, he said, "*Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold*" (Luke 19:8). Zacchaeus understood something most unbelievers – and even many believers – miss today: **forgiveness requires restitution**. If Zacchaeus sinned by defrauding someone, he declared that he would restore what was taken, and then some. That is what real repentance looks like. Repentance not only acknowledges (confesses) sin, it also turns from sin and goes above and beyond to repair whatever damage has been caused by it. When unbelievers see Christians who don't just say, "God forgive me," but also make restitution, it silences the accusation that we treat forgiveness cheaply.

When Christians refuse to make things right when we sin, unbelievers are given one more reason to harden their hearts

against the gospel. Instead of seeing a faith that produces real change, they see a religion that appears to excuse wrongdoing, and believers become partly responsible for pushing unbelievers further away from Christ.

### **SELECTIVELY ACCEPTING THE “PLAIN MEANING” OF SCRIPTURE**

Another reason some unbelievers reject Christianity is because they see believers inconsistently appealing to the “plain meaning” of scripture. For example, Christians strongly emphasize that the Bible means exactly what it says when it comes to passages like **Mark 16:16** and **1 Pet. 3:21** regarding the necessity of baptism for salvation. Denominational people typically try to explain away the obvious meaning of these passages because they do not like what they plainly teach. However, many Christians do the exact same thing with other passages as denominational people do with **Mark 16:16** and **1 Pet. 3:21** – they reject the plain meaning of scripture.

Many brethren who strongly insist on the plain meaning of scripture on certain issues explain away passages that clearly teach the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38-39, 5:32; Rom. 5:5, 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 1 Thess. 4:8**). Many Christians dismiss the plain implications of passages teaching Christians not to retaliate against those who mistreat them (**Matt. 5:38-48; Rom. 12:17-21; etc.**). Others reject the straightforward teaching of passages about women’s roles in the church, social drinking, and other similar simple but controversial topics. **When unbelievers see us emphasizing the plain meaning of scripture when it comes to baptism but not following our own advice when it comes to these issues, what message do you think that sends them?**

If you are tempted to think that unbelievers do not notice this inconsistency, think again. Many of them see it very clearly. They watch Christians demand that denominational people accept the obvious meaning of passages teaching the necessity of baptism while, at the same time, explaining away passages we personally find uncomfortable or inconvenient. As a result, some unbelievers conclude that Christianity is not really about following scripture wherever it leads, i.e. accepting the truth and letting the chips fall where they may. Instead, they conclude that Christianity allows us to redefine and reinterpret scripture based on our whims. Once that perception takes hold, it becomes much easier for unbelievers to think they can explain away the dozens of easy-to-understand passages addressing baptism, worship, morality, and anything else they prefer not to accept at face value.

When Christians are inconsistent in how we handle scripture, it becomes harder for unbelievers to trust that Christianity is a religion honestly seeking truth rather than merely defending traditions, preferences, and favorite doctrines. If unbelievers see us arbitrarily accepting some passages to accept in their plain and simple meaning while rejecting others, we should not be surprised when they arbitrarily reject the plain meaning of passages like **Mark 16:16** and **1 Pet. 3:21**.

### **SELECTIVELY APPEALING TO THE LAW OF MOSES**

A major issue I have seen that causes unbelievers to reject Christianity is when they see Christians handling the Old Testament in an arbitrary and inconsistent way.

For example, some Christians condemn homosexuality by strictly appealing to **Lev. 18:22** without ever consulting a New

Testament passage. When an unbeliever sees a Christian appealing to **Lev. 18:22** as law today while ignoring the surrounding verses' prohibitions against eating unclean foods (**Lev. 11**), wearing garments of mixed fabrics (**Lev. 19:19**), etc., they see inconsistency. They hear Christians say, "The Law of Moses isn't our law today," while selectively picking and choosing certain parts of that Law to bind today.

A common attempt to defend this inconsistency is the claim that Christians are still under the "moral law" of Moses while no longer being under the "ceremonial law." This argument has become especially popular in recent years, with people like Charlie Kirk having been a major proponent of that distinction. However, **Col. 2** completely destroys the idea that only the "ceremonial" parts of the Law were removed. Paul said that Christ took "*the handwriting of requirements that was against us*" out of the way and nailed it to the cross (**Col. 2:14**). He then specifically mentioned things like food laws, feast days, new moons, and Sabbaths (**Col. 2:16**). Those things are often labeled "ceremonial" today. However, the Sabbath command was one of the Ten Commandments (**Exod. 20:8**), which people often classify as part of the supposed "moral law." Thus, Paul's point is that the entire covenant was removed, not just portions of it (see also **Gal. 5:3**). If someone wants to appeal to the Law of Moses as binding authority today, he cannot consistently pick one favorite command while ignoring the rest. The Law of Moses stands or falls completely as one covenant.

Unbelievers see right through the inconsistency of some Christians when we quote passages like **Gal. 6:1-4**, **Rom. 7:4**, and **Col. 2:14** to prove that we are no longer under the Law of Moses but then immediately turn around and appeal to isolated Old

Testament laws whenever those laws support an argument we want to make. However, something is only binding today if the New Testament teaches that it is binding. Adultery is wrong because the New Testament condemns it. Homosexuality is wrong because the New Testament condemns it. Murder, lying, drunkenness, fornication, covetousness, etc. are wrong because the New Testament condemns them. Christians do not need to run back to Moses to prove those things are sinful because Christ and His apostles already addressed them under the New Covenant.

When unbelievers see Christians inconsistently handling the Old Testament, it damages our credibility. If we tell them they must accept the plain teaching of the New Testament but then we ourselves selectively appeal to isolated Old Testament laws only when they fit our preferences, they will often conclude that Christianity is not really about honestly following scripture. **Instead, they may view it as little more than people picking the verses they like and ignoring the ones they do not. Can you blame them?** That kind of inconsistency becomes a stumbling block that causes unbelievers to reject not only our arguments, but the gospel itself.

### **DEFENDING A SIDE RATHER THAN DEFENDING THE TRUTH**

Another issue that causes unbelievers to reject the gospel is their observance of hypocrisy in the lives of believers. Specifically, when Christians condemn the sins of others while ignoring the same behavior within their own sphere of influence, the cause of Christ gets damaged.

Consider a parallel between the church and our political system. What we are witnessing in the United States at the time

of writing is something I have watched happen in the church my entire life. People are very quick to call out the sins of the “other side,” yet remain quiet about the sins present in their own group. In politics, people loudly condemn the lies, corruption, and immorality of the opposing party, but excuse or outright ignore the same behavior when it comes from their own side. It should be no surprise that the same thing happens not just in politics but in religion as well.

Brethren make no bones about pointing out the doctrinal errors and immorality in other congregations and in false churches, all while refusing to expose the very serious problems present in our own churches. For instance, many brethren are quick to condemn the sins present in denominational churches and among our liberal brethren, yet get very tight-lipped when their family member, close friend at church, or favorite preacher is also guilty of transgressing God’s laws. Jesus condemned this attitude when He said, *“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ... First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”* (**Matt. 7:3-5**). Here, the Lord condemned holding others to a standard we refuse to apply to ourselves – the very thing we see happening throughout our churches.

Integrity requires holding everyone to the same standard (**Deut. 1:17**). If you are going to call out lies, corruption, and immorality in one group, you must be just as willing to call it out among your own group, and that is true both in politics and in religion. To do anything otherwise means your criticism is not about truth or righteousness; it is simply about loyalty to a side. **And shame on us if we are merely fighting for a side rather than fighting for the truth!** As Paul wrote,

*“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth”* (**2 Cor. 13:8**).

Our loyalty must always be to truth and righteousness, not “our side.” Consider an Old Testament example. Israel’s first king, Saul, came from the tribe of Benjamin (**1 Sam. 9:1-2, 21**). If anyone had reason to defend Saul simply because he was “one of their own,” it would have been the Benjamites. However, when Saul rebelled against God, causing God to reject him as king (**1 Sam. 15:22-23**), the Benjamites did not out of tribal loyalty excuse Saul’s behavior. Likewise, when the kingdom divided after Solomon’s reign, Benjamin did not cling to Saul’s legacy out of tribal pride. Instead, they remained with Judah and the temple in Jerusalem, where the true worship of God continued (**1 Kings 12:21**). The Benjamites’ loyalty was not to one of their own; their loyalty was to God. **We need more Benjamites in the church, brethren!**

Benjamin’s history demonstrates that loyalty to God and the truth must come before loyalty to any “tribe.” Yet, how often do we see the opposite? And what kind of message do you think that sends to unbelievers? They see Christians condemning certain sins among one group while excusing those same sins in their own groups. They see people claim to stand for truth all while being guilty of showing partiality. They see that double standard and inconsistency, and, as result, many unbelievers conclude that Christianity is not a religion that cares about truth at all. They believe we simply care about protecting our own side. Sadly, I think they are right in many cases! When Christians show partiality by defending “our side” and refuse to apply the same standard to ourselves that we apply to everyone else, we make it harder for unbelievers to see the impartiality, consistency, justice, and fairness of God.

Righteous judgment requires honesty and the courage to confront sin wherever it appears, especially when the sin exists in our own camp. The moment we excuse, minimize, or defend sin in our own group while condemning it in others, we stop serving truth and start serving ourselves. If you have ever wondered why we fail so often in converting unbelievers, maybe it is because they see the blatant hypocrisy (numerous unbelievers have said or implied as much to me recently). Many unbelievers already struggle to accept truths that require faith and submission to God, but hypocrisy gives them an additional excuse to reject Christianity altogether. When believers apply one standard to others and a different standard to our own “tribe,” we help harden unbelieving hearts against the very gospel we claim to defend.



### **ELEVATING POLITICAL OPINIONS TO THE POSITION OF TRUTH**

Going along with the previous section, another stumbling block arises when Christians elevate their political beliefs to the level of gospel truth.

In recent years, I have personally seen more and more members of the Lord’s body make statements like, “You cannot be a Christian and vote for Democrats.” Such is argued because Democrats support sins

like abortion, homosexuality, transgender ideology, etc. There is no question that those things are sinful and Christians should oppose these sins (**Rom. 1:26-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; etc.**). However, are these Christians – to use the language from the previous section – so blindly loyal to their political “tribe” that they fail to see how immoral their favorite politicians are and how they support all sorts of sinful practices too?

Unbelievers hear statements like “You cannot be a Christian and vote for Democrats” and immediately recognize the inconsistency and hypocrisy, but, for some reason, Christians who say such things fail to see the same. Unbelievers watch Christians villainize one political party for their sins while idolizing another political party who is equally guilty of heinous sins. Unbelievers hear some Christians say, “You cannot be a Christian and support Democrats because they support x, y, and z sins,” while those same Christians enthusiastically support politicians who are either personally guilty of or supporters of adultery, unscriptural divorces and remarriages, drunkenness, dishonesty, greed, crude speech, arrogance, etc.

For example, many older Christians loudly condemn Democratic politicians who support homosexuality and abortion, yet will enthusiastically praise Republican politicians of old like Ronald Reagan without any acknowledgment that he is responsible for normalizing no-fault divorces (i.e. unscriptural divorces) in America. Others excuse the repeated immorality of current politicians they support because they believe those politicians are “better on the issues.” **Unbelievers see that hypocrisy and conclude that Christians do not actually care about righteousness unless it supports their cause. Can you blame them?**

The problem is not just political inconsistency. The greater problem is that some Christians treat political affiliation as if it were part of the gospel itself. Christians can, of course, have opinions about politics, vote, and care about what happens in the nation in which they live (**Rom. 13**). Paul used his rights and privileges as a Roman citizen when it was beneficial to the cause of truth (**Acts 16:35-39; Acts 22:25-29**). Yet, Christians must never allow political identity to overshadow spiritual identity (**Phil. 3:20**). However, there are Christians today who are more offended by people condemning their favorite politician than they are over false doctrine, brethren falling away, or souls being lost, and that is not hyperbole, brethren!

When unbelievers see Christians fawning over immoral politicians and using unbalanced scales to weigh the sins of one party versus the other, it sends the message that Christianity is not really about truth, holiness, or righteousness. That kind of hypocrisy becomes a major stumbling block in bringing unbelievers to Christ because it makes them think the gospel is merely a tool for manipulation and political gain rather than the salvation of our souls.

#### **HOW CHRISTIANS HANDLE OUR DISAGREEMENTS**

Sometimes the problem lies not only in what Christians do, but also in how we speak to and about one another. One reason unbelievers may reject the gospel is because of how they see Christians biting and devouring one another on social media whenever we disagree about a biblical issue.

To be clear, publicly debating scripture is not wrong. In fact, the book of Acts shows that public debate of scripture was a routine part of first century Christianity. Paul “*reasoned with them from the scriptures*” in

## **THINK ON THIS**

**“Meditate on these things”  
(Phil. 4:8, NKJV)**

**Love is one of the most important qualities a Christian can possess. In fact, Jesus said love is the defining characteristic by which the world knows whether or not a person is His disciple (John 13:35). However, Christians are not called to love any-and-everything in this world. Rather, Christians must be quite selective with our love.**

**The Bible repeatedly teaches that children of God must be a loving people (John 13:34; 1 Cor. 13; etc.). Yet, our love must always be guided by truth and demonstrate proper discernment, i.e. sound judgment. Consider Paul’s prayer for the Philippians. He prayed that the Philippians’ love would “*abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment*” so they could “*approve the things that are excellent*” (Phil. 1:9-10). Not everything is worthy of our love. Only those things which are “*excellent*” in God’s eyes are deserving of our love.**

**Christians are called to love what is good and hate what is evil (Rom. 12:9). We should not love sin, error, worldliness, or anything that could pull us away from God (1 John 2:15-17). True biblical love is not blind, careless, or accepting of everything. Biblical love is intelligent, discerning, and rooted in truth.**

**(DTS)**

the synagogue at Thessalonica (**Acts 17:2-3**). He also “*reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily*” when he was in Athens (**Acts 17:17**). At Ephesus, he “*reasoned and persuaded concerning the things of the kingdom of God*” (**Acts 19:8-9**). These were open discussions where truth was examined and debated. So, the issue is not whether differences should ever be discussed publicly because the New Testament clearly shows that biblical differences can and, sometimes, SHOULD be openly debated. The issue is how these discussions are conducted.



I frequently engage in public debates of scripture online via social media. I debate members of the Lord’s church on social media more often than I debate denominational believers. I have learned over the years that when unbelievers watch Christians debate online, they usually are not evaluating the fine points of whatever doctrinal issue is being debated. Instead, they are watching the attitudes, tones, and behaviors of the people claiming to follow Christ. When discussions become filled with arrogance, sarcasm, sly digs, and personal attacks, the defense/search for truth between brethren gets overshadowed by the sinful conduct of those representing it. Paul warned about this very thing when he wrote that the Lord’s servants “*must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those*

*who are in opposition*” (**2 Tim. 2:24-25**). The goal of debating scripture is not to win arguments or embarrass others. The goal is that people might “*come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil*” (**2 Tim. 2:26**). Sadly, brethren often forget these things in the midst of a debate.

Unbelievers are watching us, brethren. If they see bitterness and hostility between people who claim to follow Christ, many will conclude that Christianity offers nothing different from the spirit they already see everywhere else throughout the world. When we give a defense of the hope that is within us, we must always do so “*with meekness*” (**1 Pet. 3:15**) and in a loving way (**Eph. 4:15**). If we fail to possess this spirit, we are nothing more than a “*clanging symbol*” (**1 Cor. 13:1**) in the ears of unbelievers.

Public debate of scripture is authorized by the New Testament. The book of Acts proves that. **But if we are not careful about our tone and conduct, unbelievers may reject the gospel, not because the message is flawed but because the messengers failed to properly reflect the character of Christ.** Christians must remember that the gospel is not merely a message we proclaim but a life we are called to live. When our speech reflects the character of Christ by exhibiting love, graciousness, and kindness, our influence for good is strengthened. When our speech is not governed by these traits, it becomes yet another reason for unbelievers to dismiss Christianity.

### **FALSE TEACHING IN OUR BROTHERHOOD**

Some unbelievers reject Christianity due to the confusion created by false teachers in the church. Note that I am not referring to false teachers who are spreading false doctrine in denominational churches but

false teachers in the Lord's body preaching false doctrine and, thus, creating confusion.

Many people imagine false teachers as obvious fraudsters who promote obviously immoral behavior. However, false teaching is often much more subtle than that, especially within churches making up the true body of Christ. False teachers are not always mustache twirling villains who look like someone from an old Western movie. False teachers are usually much more subtle.

False teaching can come from brethren who are sincere, knowledgeable, and even outwardly faithful (**Matt. 7:15; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; etc.**). False teachers typically do not present themselves as enemies of the truth. Instead, they seem just like any other Christian. New Testament churches dealt with this problem. Paul warned the churches of Galatia about "*false brethren secretly brought in*" (**Gal. 2:4**). The church at Corinth also had to deal with "*false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ*" (**2 Cor. 11:13**). Paul warned the Ephesian elders that "*from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*" (**Acts 20:30**). In other words, false teaching does not always come from obvious outsiders. Sometimes it comes from people within the church. This is one reason false teaching can be so dangerous. Error does not always announce itself loudly or present itself in big bold letters as false doctrine. Sometimes it enters gradually through emotional appeals or teachings that sound close enough to the truth to avoid immediate suspicion.

This creates a real challenge for unbelievers who are being exposed to the Lord's church for the first time. Imagine, for example, someone trying to learn the gospel while hearing dozens of different churches

of God's people teaching completely different things about divorce and remarriage. If that person hears one group saying the only scriptural reason for divorce and remarriage is fornication, then hears another church say divorce for any reason is acceptable, what is that person supposed to think? Then, later he hears a church teaching that the guilty party in a divorce can never remarry, while another says both the divorcee and the divorced are eligible for remarriage. He hears one group prop up "mental divorce," claiming that a person legally divorced by his spouse can later put away the person in his mind after adultery occurs, while hearing another church rejecting that doctrine entirely. **I'm a Christian and this is overwhelming to me; just imagine how overwhelming this all must be to someone outside the faith!**

When unbelievers witness the types of contradictory teachings like I have just discussed, some conclude that every interpretation is equally valid (i.e. 2+2 can equal 4, 5,

## **SWORD SWIPES**

**"Shun profane and vain babblings"**  
**(2 Tim. 2:16a, KJV)**

**The greatest rule of hermeneutics is simply asking, "What does the text say," then letting the chips fall wherever they may.**

*"How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)" (Eph. 3:3-4).*

**(DTS)**

and 6 as long as we are all sincere in what we believe), or that no one can ever really know the truth. Some unbelievers already struggle enough with accepting difficult truths that require great sacrifice, but subtle false teaching makes that struggle even greater by filling the religious world with confusion and contradiction. When believers tolerate or spread error, we become a stumbling block that keeps unbelievers from seeing the truth as clearly as they should. Worse, we convey the message that the truth of God simply cannot be understood alike or understood at all.

### WHEN HUMAN STANDARDS REPLACE THE GOSPEL

Another problem that often undermines Christianity is the tendency of some believers to create human standards for who is “acceptable” to publicly serve in the church after they have repented of sin. For example, occasionally, a Christian commits a serious sin that becomes widely known. The individual may repent, confess the wrongdoing, and fulfill whatever restitution is necessary to clear himself of whatever wrongdoing he was guilty of. Yet, despite genuine repentance, some Christians believe that person should never again serve the church in any visible role within the local congregation. In their view, a repentant Christian might be allowed to attend worship, but he should not preach, lead singing, teach class, or serve in any way publicly.

This attitude is often defended by appealing to passages such as **1 Tim. 5:22**, which says, “*Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.*” This verse warns against endorsing someone prematurely or participating in that person’s sins; it does not teach that a repentant Christian who has no charges of wrongdoing held against him must be perma-

nently sidelined from service. When people adopt the former interpretation, they must ignore one of the most powerful examples in scripture: the apostle Paul.

Describing himself, Paul wrote, “*And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life*” (**1 Tim. 1:12-16**). Paul persecuted Christians, imprisoned them, and approved of their deaths (**Acts 8:1, 9:1-2, 26:10-11**). Yet, after his conversion, Christ placed Paul directly into ministry. His past did not permanently disqualify him; instead, Paul’s repentance and changed conduct became a testimony to the power of God’s grace.

The Corinthians provide an important warning about how we treat repentant sinners. In **1 Cor. 5**, Paul commanded the church in Corinth to withdraw from a Christian who was guilty of sexual immorality. However, by the time Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, the man evidently repented. At that point, Paul warned the church not to continue punishing him since the man cleared himself of his wrongdoings. He said, “*This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest per-*

*haps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2 Cor. 2:6-8).* If the Corinthians chose not to fully restore this repentant brother, they would have driven him to despair rather than help him grow. Church discipline has a purpose: to produce repentance and restoration, not permanent exclusion. Paul even went so far as to warn that failing to restore the repentant Corinthian brother would play directly into Satan’s hands (2 Cor. 2:11). When churches refuse to fully restore those who have genuinely repented, they risk doing exactly what Paul warned against – allowing discouragement and despair to overwhelm the person whom discipline was meant to save!

Those who were once deep in sin but have been genuinely transformed by the gospel can become some of the most powerful examples of God’s grace. Their lives visibly demonstrate the very thing Christianity claims to accomplish – that sinners, including erring Christians, can change. **When unbelievers see someone who once lived in open sin but has repented, made restitution, and is now faithfully serving God, it can show them that transformation is possible for them too.** Going back to 1 Tim. 1, Paul said his own conversion served as a “*pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life*” (1 Tim. 1:16). A transformed life is living proof that the gospel truly has the power to change people. We should want unbelievers to see that proof exemplified by our restored brethren!

Creating man-made standards for who is “fit” to publicly serve in the church not only contradicts the gospel, it also sends the wrong message to unbelievers. The very heart of Christianity is the transformation of sinners. Jesus Himself said, “*Those who are*

*well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick ... for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matt. 9:12-13).* When unbelievers see Christians preach forgiveness but refuse to fully restore those who have repented, they see inconsistency. We claim the gospel changes lives, yet we sometimes behave as though certain sins permanently define a person. The gospel teaches the exact opposite. In Christ, sinners can be forgiven, restored, and transformed into faithful servants of God, including as public-facing examples within our churches.

Countless unbelievers already doubt whether the gospel can truly transform sinners, but when Christians refuse to fully restore the repentant, we confirm their skepticism. Instead of displaying the power of God’s grace, believers become partly responsible for making Christianity appear unable to accomplish what it claims.

### CONCLUSION

If unbelievers reject Christianity, the blame does not always rest in only one place. Believers must realize that, at times, we may be partly responsible for unbelievers rejecting the gospel. Whenever our conduct, speech, teaching, or judgment contradicts the message we proclaim, we place stumbling blocks before those who observe and interact with us. And remember the words of our Lord: “*Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to the person through whom the stumbling block comes*” (Matt. 18:7, NASB). Christians must live in such a way that we never give unbelievers additional reasons to turn away from Christ: Let’s do all we can to bring others closer to Christ and do all we can to avoid pushing them further away from Him.

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

“And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks” (Hebrews 11:4, ESV).

### Why Do You Believe...?

CARROL SUTTON

PUBLISHED JUL. – OCT. 1994 IN **THE INSTRUCTOR** (VOL. 31, NOS. 7-10)



The apostle Peter exhorts Christians to “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). “Be ready” suggests the idea of being prepared. We should be able and willing to give an answer for our hope. We should know **WHAT** we believe and **WHY** we believe it. Otherwise, we have no true convictions. Our convictions must be based on the Word of God!

Faith is very important! By faith we are justified (Rom. 5:1), purified (Acts 15:9), and saved (Acts 16:31). We walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7); it is by faith that we live! Paul said, “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17). Faith can make us victorious over the world! John declared, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1

John 5:4). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

From whence cometh faith? In other words, how do men obtain or receive faith? It is not inherited! It cannot be bought, borrowed nor stolen! Paul declared, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). True faith is produced by hearing the Word of the living God (Luke 8:11-15; John 20:30-31). In order for me to have faith I must hear God’s Word! Since man cannot direct his steps, we must listen to God as He speaks through His Word! Neither you nor I have any right to believe anything in spiritual matters unless it is taught in the Word of God!

Why do you believe what you do? Both what you believe and why you believe it are important!

#### THE MAJORITY BELIEVES IT

Under the Old Testament, the children of Israel were told, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment” (Exo. 23:2). In the days of Noah, “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Then, in Gen. 7:1 we read, “And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” The majority perished in the flood!

In **Exo. 32** when Aaron made a molten golden calf and the Israelites worshipped it, only the sons of Levi stood with Moses when Moses said, “*Who is on the Lord’s side? Let him come unto me*” (v.26). Only one tribe out of twelve stood with Moses! The majority did not stand with him!

Of the twelve men who were sent to “*search*” the land of Canaan, the majority gave “*an evil report*” of the land. Only two gave a good report! The congregation “*bade stone them with stones.*” The majority of the “*spies*” were wrong and the majority of the Israelites stood with those who were wrong and desired that the two men who were right be stoned (see **Num. 13-14**).

When the kingdom of Israel divided, ten of the twelve tribes rebelled against Rehoboam, son of Solomon. Only two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) remained loyal to King Rehoboam (**1 Kings 12**). The majority rebelled against God’s arrangement!

According to **Gen. 18-19**, Sodom and Gomorrah were wicked cities. If ten righteous people could have been found in Sodom, it would have been spared. But there were not ten righteous people in Sodom, so it was destroyed (also see **2 Pet. 2:6-8**). The overwhelming majority was wrong!

During His personal ministry here on earth, Jesus warned, “*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*” (**Matt. 7:13-14**). According to Jesus, the majority (the many) will be lost! A minority (the few) will receive life!

Man’s opinion or the Word of God? Let us consider some things that man’s opinion says but the Word of God does not teach!

The opinion of the majority says that “it does not matter what one believes as long as he is sincere,” but the Word of God does NOT so teach! (**2 John 9-10; Gal. 1:6-9; John 8:32; Heb. 13:9; Matt. 15:7-9, 15:13; Jude 3**)

The opinion of the majority says that “all good (moral) people will be saved,” but the Word of God does NOT so teach! (**Acts 10-11; Matt. 7:21, 26:28; Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8-9**).

The opinion of the majority says that “one church is as good as another,” but the Word of God does NOT so teach! (**1 Cor. 12:13, 20; Matt. 15:13, 16:18; Acts 2:47, 20:28; Eph. 1:22-23, 3:10-11, 4:4-6; Col. 1:18**).

The opinion of the majority says that “one is saved by faith only,” but the Word of God does NOT so teach! (**Eph. 2:5, 8-9; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; James 2:14-24; Gal. 5:6; Heb. 5:9; Rev. 22:14; Matt. 7:21**).

The opinion of the majority says that “it does not matter how we worship God,” but the Word of God does NOT so teach! (**John 4:23-24; Matt. 4:10, 15:7-9; Phil. 3:3**).

The opinion of the majority says that “it is alright to drink intoxicants, dance, dress immodestly, curse a little, tell dirty jokes, lie some, cheat a bit, use tobacco, gamble, etc.” but the Word of God does NOT so teach! (**1 Pet. 4:3-4; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 2:9; James 3:9-10; 1 Cor. 6:19-20, 10:31; 1 Thess. 5:22**).

Why do you believe what you do? Is it because of what the Word of God says or what the multitudes (the majority) say?

### FEELINGS

There are many people who allow their emotions to be the standard by which they determine what they believe. If they “feel” that a certain thing is right, they accept it. If not,

they reject it. Some will say, “I know I am saved because I feel like I am,” or “I wouldn’t trade what I feel for a stack of Bibles a mile high,” or “I just feel like it is right,” etc.

Jacob “*mourned for his son [Joseph] many days*” and “*refused to be comforted*” and said “*I will go down into the grave of my son mourning*” because he really “felt like” his son Joseph was dead! However, twenty or so years later Jacob found his son Joseph alive in Egypt! His “belief” that Joseph was dead caused him to “*feel*” sorrowful (**Gen. 37:23-35**).

Our “feelings” are not the standard by which we must live and by which we will be judged in the last day! **Jer. 17:9** says, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*” Solomon warned, “*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool*” (**Prov. 28:26**). Hear Solomon again: “*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (**Prov. 16:25**). A way is not right merely because “it seems right!”

No doubt, Saul of Tarsus “felt like” he was serving God when he beat and imprisoned Christians and when he “*consented*” to the death of Stephen and “*kept the raiment of them that slew him*” (**Acts 22:19-20**). Later, he declared, “*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem*” (**Acts 26:9-10**).

One cannot know that he is saved because he “feels” like he is! However, one can know that he is “saved” by what is written in God’s Word. John said, “*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may KNOW that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*” (**1 John 5:13**). We can know by what is written that we have

eternal life! No, we cannot know by our “feelings!”

Teeming millions of people believe and practice false doctrines because they “feel like” they are right. What about you? Do you believe what you do because of your feelings? You cannot trust your “feelings” to be a proper standard as to what is right. You must allow the Word of God to be your standard! If you would please God, you must believe what you do because it is what God’s Book teaches! Do you?

### TRADITIONS

Some people believe what they do because they have been taught human traditions. They have been taught doctrines and commandments of men. They do not question what they have been taught but blindly accept it.

In speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said, “*Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*” (**Matt. 15:7-9**). Jesus also said, “*For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such things ye do. Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition*” (**Mark 7:8-9**). Traditions of men make void the Word of God!

Prior to his becoming a disciple of Christ, Saul was “*zealous of the traditions*” of his fathers. During that time, he “*persecuted the church of God, and wasted it*” (**Gal. 1:13-14**). Later, he exhorted, “*Not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men, that turn from the truth*” (**Titus 1:14**). In **Col. 2:8**, Paul warned, “*Beware lest any man spoil*

*you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8).*

Peter mentions the fact that those to whom he addressed his first epistle had received their prior vain conversation by tradition from their fathers (1 Pet. 1:18).

### CONSCIENCE

Is “a good conscience” the basis of our faith? Is a thing right because a person can engage in such with “a good conscience?” Would you try to justify a belief or practice on “a good conscience?” Would you contend for any of the following:

“One can go to heaven in a denomination - IF he has a good conscience.”

“An alien sinner can be saved without water baptism - IF he has a good conscience.”

“It is alright to call a man ‘Reverend’, ‘Father’, ‘Rabbi’, ‘Doctor’, ‘Brother’, etc. (as religious titles) - IF one has a good conscience.”

“It does not matter how one worships God - IF he has a good conscience.”

“It is alright for a church to engage in recreation, entertainment and secular business - IF all the members have a good conscience.”

“It is alright to dress immodestly - IF a person has a good conscience.”

“It is alright to cheat - IF a person can do so with a good conscience.”

“It is alright to lie - IF a person can do so with a good conscience.”

“It is alright to commit adultery - IF a person can do so with a good conscience.”

“It is alright for a person to commit murder - IF he has a good conscience.”

Please consider the fact that IF a person can justify one of the above things, why can’t he justify all of them on the same basis? If hav-

## ILLUSTRATIONS

**“He did not tell them anything without illustrating it with a story”  
(Matt. 13:34b, GW)**

**True friendship is not necessarily measured by how often we talk, laugh, or spend time together. True friendship is measured by whether we care enough to help each other get to heaven.**

**James said, “Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20). Imagine two friends hiking atop a mountain and one of the hikers begins walking too close to the edge of the cliff. A true friend would not remain silent in a moment of such great danger. In this situation, a true friend would shout, try to pull the person away from the edge of the cliff, and do everything possible to keep his friend from falling.**

**If we see a person walking towards the edge of a spiritual cliff by making choices that endanger his soul, seeing that person as our friend should compel us to speak up and try to “snatch” that person away from the cliff (Jude 23). Silence might feel easier in the moment, but it is not at all indicative of true friendship.**

**True friends do not sit quietly by and let friends lose their souls.**

**(DTS)**

ing “a good conscience” is the standard that justifies one of these things, why can’t it be the standard that justifies all of them? The truth is simple. “A good conscience” is NOT the standard by which right and wrong are decided!

Consider Saul of Tarsus. When Stephen was killed, Saul held the clothes of those who stoned him and consented to his death (**Acts 22:20**). He “*imprisoned and beat in every synagogue*” those who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (**Acts 22:19**). Hear him (now known as Paul) before the chief priests and all their council when he said, “*Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day*” (**Acts 23:1**). Consider the fact that later, before King Agrippa, Paul declared, “*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities*” (**Acts 26:9-12**). Please observe the following facts:

- (1) Saul did “*many things contrary to the name of Jesus!*”
- (2) Saul “*shut up in prison*” many saints!
- (3) Saul “*punished*” saints often “*in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme.*”
- (4) Saul was “*exceedingly mad*” against the saints and “*compelled*” them to “*blaspheme.*”
- (5) When saints were put to death, Saul gave his voice against them!

(6) Saul “*persecuted*” saints even unto strange cities.

(7) Saul “*lived in all good conscience before God*” while engaging in the above things!

(8) Saul “*verily thought*” with himself that he “*ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*”

Although Saul had a “*good conscience*” and “*verily thought*” he was faithfully serving God, he was, in fact, sinning!

### “IT’S A GOOD WORK”

Many people try to justify what they encourage and practice in religious matters on the basis of that “it’s a good work.” Many are deceived into thinking what they do about some things because someone says, “It’s a good work!”

We are taught to be “*fruitful in every good work*” (**Col. 1:10**), “*zealous of good works*” (**Titus 2:14**), and “*ready unto every good work*” (**Titus 3:1**). Churches as “collectivities” and Christians as “individuals” should engage in every “good work” ordained of God for them. However, we must be careful that we allow the Scriptures to be the standard in determining what are truly good works.

Paul declared that “*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**; see also **James 1:25**; **1 Pet. 4:11**; **Col. 3:17**; **2 Pet. 1:3**; **Eph. 5:10**; **2 John 9-11**). Without doubt, for a practice to truly be a good work it must be authorized by the Word of God! Ambitions, impressions, popularity, emotions, etc. do not make a thing a good work in the sight of God. The ways and thoughts

of God are as much superior to our ways and thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth (**Isa. 55:8-9**).

The following is a list of some things that some people try to “justify” on the basis that “it’s a good work:”

Sprinkling infants.

Celebrating Christmas as the birthday of Jesus Christ.

Churches having “Honor the clergy day.”

Starting “ministries” such as PTL, TBN, The Oral Roberts Ministry, The Jimmy Swaggart Ministry, etc.

Churches sponsoring Boy Scouts and Blood Drives.

Churches donating funds to organizations such as the Red Cross and The United Givers Fund.

Churches raising money for their work by begging campaigns, pie suppers, rummage sales, car washes, selling flowers or candy, or engaging in some other secular business (**compare 1 Cor. 16:2**).

Churches providing facilities for recreation, entertainment, and social activities.

Churches donating funds to sponsoring church arrangements.

Churches building and maintaining “bus ministry” organizations that give toys, bubble gum prizes, etc. as incentives to ride the bus, etc.

Churches donating funds to schools such as David Lipscomb College.

Churches building and maintaining benevolent organizations such as Childhaven, Home For The Aged, etc. for the care of the needy.

There are those who will accept one or more of the above things on the basis of it being “a

good work.” Do you accept any of the above on that basis? If you accept any of the above on that basis, why not accept all of them? The Word of God is the only standard we must use in order to determine what constitutes “a good work!”

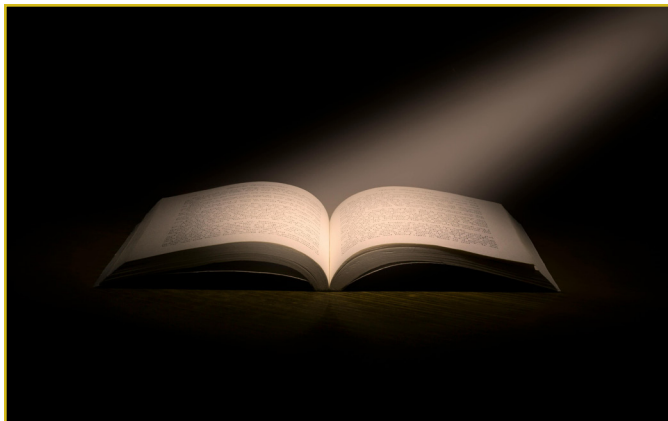
### “I LIKE IT”

Is there anything you believe is right in spiritual matters because you like it? Please be honest!

What about “faith only” salvation? Praying through? Sprinkling for baptism? Wearing human names religiously? Using mechanical instrumental music in worship? Calling the preacher “Reverend”, “Father”, “Master”, “Doctor”, “Rabbi”, etc. as a religious title? Would you condone smoking, drinking, cursing, gambling, swearing, men having long hair, dressing immodestly, women having short hair, materialism, etc., because you like it? Would you contend that churches may donate funds to so-called “Christian Schools”, institutional orphanages, sponsoring church arrangements, recreational, entertainment and social projects, or engage in secular businesses because you like it? Neither your nor my “likes” or “dislikes” should ever be used as a standard to determine right or wrong.

Keep in mind that the Scriptures are sufficient to guide us in all spiritual matters (**2 Tim. 3:16-17; James 1:25; 2:12; 2 Pet. 1:3; 1 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 22:18-19; 2 John 9-11**). You should not believe anything is right because of the majority, your feelings, traditions of men, a good conscience, “it’s a good work,” or because you like it! None of these things will judge us in the last day. We will be judged by the Word of Christ (**John 12:48**).

*“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12).*



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