

# The Whole Counsel of God

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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 2024

It is with great joy we present the fifth edition of *The Whole Counsel of God*. As always, we appreciate the encouragement each of you provide by your desire to “seek those things which are above” (Col. 3:1). In this edition of the journal, we have included an article examining some common myths regarding angels. Since angels are commonly misunderstood both by believers and unbelievers alike, I think it is worthy for all to consider what is discussed in this article in hopes that we might be better understand these “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14). This



article is excerpted from a much longer study concerning angels; the full article is available for your viewing by clicking the hyperlink provided in the associated title box.

We have also included an article examining a false argument the “gay church” makes regarding the destruction of Sodom. These churches assert that Sodom was not destroyed for homosexuality and, therefore, in their minds, a key “proof text” condemning homosexuality falls apart. The article refutes this argument showing by the scriptures how Sodom was, in fact, destroyed for homosexuality, as well as for the additional reasons recognized by scriptures as well as the “gay church.”

Additionally, in this month's edition of the journal there is an article that ponders the question, “Suppose I Was Born a Muslim?” By using the scriptures, this article addresses how, regardless of our upbringing and regardless of the various influences around us, all people can come to the knowledge of the truth if their hearts are set on seeking and understanding it.

Lastly, we have included an article examining the subject of feet washing, which is a subject that I have never heard taught publicly. I hope you will find its inclusion here to be beneficial.

We pray these articles and all other articles included in this edition of the journal will edify, increase our desire for and knowledge of God's word, and increase our resolve to serve God faithfully.

(DTS)

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## Being an Enabler

RICK LIGGIN | TEXAS, UNITED STATES

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In the field of civil law, there are sometimes people who “aid and abet” criminals, and there are also those who “contribute to the delinquency of a minor.” To do either of these is against the law, and those who do it become criminals themselves. In the field of psychology, there are sometimes people who are identified as “enablers,” because they enable others (often their own loved ones) to be involved in addictive behavior. “Enablers” are not necessarily people who would themselves participate in the addictive conduct; they may actually even oppose it. But by their actions they make it easy for the addict to continue in his addiction.



In spiritual matters, we also unfortunately have people who “aid and abet” evildoers, or who “contribute to the delinquency” of sinners, or who become “enablers” of those who are doing wrong! Now, you might be thinking of those who practice deeds that are “worthy of death,” while also giving “heartly approval” (NASB) to those who practice “such things” (Rom. 1:32). But these are not the “enablers” we are talking about. The “enablers” we are talking about

would not practice the sins that they “aid and abet.” In fact, they would oppose and carefully avoid such practices in their own lives. And yet, they enable others (especially when the “others” are their own family or loved ones) to practice sinful behavior. How does that happen? In what way do they “aid and abet” evildoers or “enable” those who are given to sin?

Often, it is done by down-playing the person’s sin or by even offering excuses for the “poor helpless sinner.” More often than not, they enable sinners by their silence. Instead of lovingly confronting the sinner (Matt. 18:15) and exposing his crime (Eph. 5:11), they ignore the sin and pretend it isn’t really happening. Even worse, they hamper the local church’s efforts to correct the sinner by continuing to socialize and associate with the one who has been collectively disciplined by the group (1 Cor. 5:1-13). When will we learn that this does not help the sinner to correct his ways? It only enables him to continue in his evil deeds!

Don’t you dare be an “enabler” of sin! Don’t you dare “contribute to the delinquency” of one who is caught up in a trespass or “aid and abet” a sinner in the error of his way! Instead, be an encourager and “enabler” of that which is good, even if it means you must confront and oppose someone you love. If you really love someone in sin, you will not enable him to continue in the error of his way; you will, instead, do whatever you can to turn him back to God... to “save his soul from death” and to “cover a multitude of sins” (Jas. 5:19-20).

# Understanding Angels - Myths

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There are many beliefs today about angels not based on Scriptural teaching but on sentiment and superstition. We will now explore some myths about them using the Scriptures as our guide.

## ANGELS ARE WOMEN

In art and literature, and in most people's minds, angels are usually depicted or thought of as females. One might contend that angels are neither male nor female since they have a spiritual body. They are a part of God's invisible creation (**Col. 1:16-17**) and typically do not appear in human form. They are "ministering spirits" (**Heb. 1:14**) and do not procreate (**Mt. 22:31**). Contrary to popular portrayals, when in human form, the Bible refers to them as men — masculine pronouns are always used. Neuter forms were available in the original languages but the male form is used exclusively. Two angels (Michael and Gabriel) are even named, and their names are masculine. In fact, **Dan. 9:21** says, "Yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering" (Note also **Dan. 8:15-16**).

Consider further some Biblical occurrences of angels appearing as men.

- **Sodom and Gomorrah** — Three "men" appeared to Abraham and Sarah and told them they would bear a son (**Gen. 18:1-14**). After that, two of the men went to Sodom and were called "angels" (**Gen. 19:1, 5, 15, 16**).
- **Announcement of Samson's Birth** — The book of **Judges** records an angel appear-

ing to Manoah and his wife to announce the birth of Samson, who would be a deliverer of Israel. Throughout the story, the writer refers to this messenger interchangeably as a man and an angel (**Jud. 13: 3, 6, 8-11,13,15, 21**).

- **At the Resurrection of Christ** — After Jesus' crucifixion, various women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They noted the rolled-away stone from the entrance upon arrival, as the writer describes in **Mark 16:4-6**: "*But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away — for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.'*" **Mt. 28:1-6** describes this man as an angel whose "countenance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow."
- **Jesus' Ascension** — Two angels were present at Jesus's ascension back to heaven when a cloud received Him out of their sight. **Acts 1:10** informs us, "*And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel.*" They assured the apostles that Jesus would return. These two were obviously angels.
- **Peter's Release from Prison** — Peter was sleeping in prison, bound with two chains between two soldiers, and an angel caused the chains to fall off his hands. Then the angel told him to tie on his san-

dal, “*And he said to him, put on your garment and follow me*” (**Acts 12:8**). When the Bible specifies gender, it depicts angels as male.

Some raise an objection based on **Zech. 5:5-11** where the writer describes a vision revealed by an angel to Zechariah. A woman, representing wickedness, is put into a basket and covered by a lead disc. Two women carry the basket to Shinar with the wings of a stork. There are various interpretations of the different aspects of this vision. Yet, we can conclude that the two women are not angels but are spoken of separately from the angel who communicated with Zechariah. Instead, like the woman in the basket, they are figures that represent something else (“The Hosts of Heaven: A Biblical Study of Angels,” Quertermous 2-3).

The Bible always speaks of God in masculine terms, and when angels appear in human form, the same is so with them. Although God can make them appear in any form He chooses, from the standpoint of Scriptural evidence, we have no record of angels appearing in human form as females.

### ANGELS HAVE WINGS

A winged creature is usually the first image that comes to mind when someone thinks of an angel. This impression is partly due to angels being depicted in this way by artists centuries ago. But, the view that angels have wings existed long before the Middle Ages. For example, Tertullian, an early Christian writer who wrote around 200 A.D., said, “Every spirit possesses wings. This is a common property of both angels and demons. So they are everywhere in a single moment. The whole world is as one place to them. It is easy for them to know everything that is done over the whole extent of the world, and to report it” (“A Dictionary of

Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers,” Bercot 15). Is this ancient view correct, and are modern-day portrayals of winged angels accurate? To begin with, consider **Heb. 13:2**, which says, “*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.*” How would this be possible if these “strangers” had wings on their backs? We would at least know that the stranger was not a human since people do not have wings. Also, as noted earlier, angels appeared as men, i.e., they looked like humans. Any alterations to their appearances (**Mt. 28:1-6**) did not include a set of wings.

Consider some passages commonly used to prove that angels fly with wings. In **Dan. 9**, the angel Gabriel explains the Feast of Weeks to Daniel. **Verse 21** says, “*Yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering.*” Scholars tell us that the phrase from the Hebrew rendered “*caused to fly swiftly*” is difficult to translate. Although most translations say, “*fly swiftly*” or “*swift flight*,” the rendering can be “*fly in weariness*” or “*weary in weariness.*” Some apply **verse 21** to Daniel, himself. The NASB translates **verse 21** as “*came to me in my extreme weariness*” (Compare to **Dan. 8:27**). But if it does refer to Gabriel, Daniel says nothing about wings — it does not say how he flew (Hailey, “A Commentary on Daniel,” 178-179; Young 189-190).

The book of **Revelation** mentions the movement of angels. For example, it speaks of an angel ascending from the east (**7:2**), standing in the sun (**19:17**), and coming down from heaven (**10:1, 20:1**). Wings are not involved in any of these cases. However, **Rev. 14:6** does speak of an angel flying:

*“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth - to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.”* But, again, the verse does not say the angel had wings. Also, the book of **Revelation** is highly figurative. The scene’s intent seems symbolic, representing the rapid spread of the gospel.

It is clear from the Bible that in the historical appearances of angels in both the Old and New Testaments, they did not fly with wings. Also, except when they appear as men, angels are in spirit form. Why does a spirit need wings to travel from one place to another?

### ANGELS PLAY HARPS

What musical instruments do angels play? Most will respond by saying that angels play harps. However, from the Scriptures, there is no indication that angels play harps or any musical instrument. This romanticized version may have originated from ancient gods being depicted playing harps or lyres.

A passage sometimes used to prove this position is **Rev. 14:2**, where the 144,000 (the redeemed) are praising God. It says, *“And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps”* (ESV). In each

case, the writer makes a comparison. There was not “many waters,” “loud thunder,” and “harpists playing their harps,” but the “voice” was like these.

### ANGELS ARE DEAD SAINTS IN HEAVEN

A common view about death is that when people die, they become angels. We see this theme often on television. People die and become angels, and then to get their “wings” or to get into heaven, they must come back to earth and help someone. During a funeral, especially for a young child, the preacher may suggest the deceased child is now another one of God’s angels or God now has a new angel. Although this may be comforting, nowhere in the Scriptures does it teach that people become angels when they die.

God created angels, but He did so before He created humans (**Ps. 148:1-5; Neh. 9:5-6; Job 38:4-7**). Although there is some commonality, humans and angels are different beings. Angels are angels, and humans are humans. For example, in the case of the rich man and Lazarus (**Lk. 16:19-22**), we learn when Lazarus died, he went to Abraham’s Bosom or Paradise. Angels carried him there, but Lazarus did not become an angel.

To justify this viewpoint, some turn to an occasion during Jesus’s ministry when



the Sadducees questioned Him about the resurrection (**Lk. 20**). He responded by saying, *“But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”* (**35-36**). First, it does not say we will be angels but “equal” to them. (Some translations say “like;” note also **Mt. 22:30** and **Mk. 12:25**). As noted previously, equality (likeness) is only in two areas, according to the verse: we will not marry nor will we die. These verses fall far short of saying people become angels when they die.

God is eternal with no beginning or end. Like angels, we are not eternal, but we are immortal. Angels and humans both have a beginning but will not have an end. The faithful will be in heaven with the angels, but they will not be angels.



### WE ARE TO WORSHIP ANGELS

Today some denominations worship angels as patron saints and even have feast days dedicated to particular ones. In addition, organized religious groups exist which devote themselves to worshipping angels, with some seeming to pay more attention to them than God. So, yes, the danger is there.

There is much debate among scholars as to the origin of this doctrine. Some think it was a part of the early stages of Gnosticism, which later taught that people could only approach God through the medium of angelic beings. Regardless, God’s Word teaches that worshipping angels is a sin.

Recall the biblical account of God telling Peter to go and preach to Cornelius (**Acts 10**). When he arrived, Cornelius, who had also called together his relatives and close friends (**24-25**), *“Met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man.’”* If Cornelius could fall down and worship Peter (a man), the inclination to worship angels may be even greater.

Consider also the time Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. The last temptation of the three involved Satan taking Christ to a very high mountain, and while showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, he made an offer: *“All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me”* (**Mt. 4:9**). Imagine Satan asking Jesus to fall down and worship him. The idea of the supreme being worshipping the devil is astonishing. The devil wanted Jesus to transfer His allegiance from God to him. It seems he wanted Christ to rule with him in his domain, making Jesus a subordinate. How did Jesus respond? He told Satan to “get away” and then appealed to the Scriptures (**Deut. 6:13**), saying, *“You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.”* Jesus did not respond by using His miraculous power; He had to resist as we do by relying on the Scriptures. He said God is the only one to worship. So, we are to worship God and Him only.

As noted earlier, in **Col. 2:18**, Paul warns, *“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he*

*has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.” Thus, Paul specifically condemns worshipping angels.*

After John heard an angel’s description of the New Jerusalem in **Rev. 22**, he fell down and worshiped the angel. **Verses 8-9** describe the scene: *“Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’”* Perhaps John was “carried away” by the situation, but he did wrong, and the angel told him to worship only God. (Note also **Rev. 19:9-10**).

Today, we should only worship God. It is a sin to worship angels!

#### **ANGELS ARE ALWAYS GENTLE & SERENE**

“Soft as the voice of an angel . . .” The popular view of angels is that they epitomize serenity and peace. Although the Scriptures teach they have guided, guarded, and assured God’s people, it also teaches that angels have often executed death and destruction on the enemies of God. Consider some examples:

- Angels smote certain men of Sodom with blindness (**Gen. 19:1, 11**) and were the instruments of the city’s destruction (**Gen. 19:13**).
- In one night, the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, which caused Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, to lift his siege against Jerusalem (**2 Kgs. 19:35-36**).
- David sinned by numbering the people, and an angel destroyed 70,000 Israelites and was about to destroy all of Jerusalem when God stopped him (**2 Sam. 24:15-17**).

- King Herod killed James and persecuted the church (**Acts 12**). After he finished, the people said he spoke with the voice of a god instead of the voice of a man, and Herod accepted this praise. **Verse 23** says, *“Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.”*
- **Psalm 78:49** describes God’s punishment against Egypt: *“He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction among them.”* These angels executed destruction!

Contrary to what many think, angels can be forces of destruction and death.

### **MYTH BUSTERS**

**“They will turn away their ears from the truth & will turn aside to myths”  
(2 Tim. 4:4, NASB)**

Many denominations teach that once a person is saved, he can never lose his salvation. Then, there are some, albeit few, denominations who teach that if a person loses his salvation, he can never regain it. The first doctrine provides false hope while the second doctrine provides false fear. James 5:19-20 proves both doctrines wrong: *“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 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”* Clearly, a Christian can lose his salvation, but it is equally clear that if a Christian does lose his salvation, it is possible for him to regain it. (DTS)

# Sodom Was Not Destroyed for Homosexuality?

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In **Gen. 19:1-24**, we can read of God's wrath orchestrated against two ancient cities - Sodom and Gomorrah. In **v.4-5**, we can see why God destroyed these cities. The ISV translates this passage thusly: "*Before they could lie down, all the men of Sodom and its outskirts, both young and old, surrounded the house. They called out to Lot and asked, 'Where are the men who came to visit you tonight? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!'*" (also consider the NASB, CSB, GNT, NIV, CEB, GW, and CEV translations). Clearly, these cities were guilty of homosexuality, which brought about the Lord's swift and utter destruction. Throughout the Bible, God uses Sodom and Gomorrah as evidence to not transgress His laws (see **Deut. 29:23; Isa. 3:9, 13:19; Jer. 23:14; Lam. 4:6; Amos 4:11; Matt. 10:15, 11:23-24; Luke 10:12, 17:28-30**). Peter illustrated the danger of living like those citizens by describing God's destruction against these cities, saying, "*By turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly*" (**2 Pet. 2:6**). Yet, those who claim homosexuality is not a sin often point to **Ezek. 16:49-50** to argue that Sodom was not destroyed for their homosexuality. Since this argument is a common talking point for those claiming homosexuality is not a sin, let's consider if this argument is rooted in truth or error.

**Ezek. 16:49-50** reads, "*Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomi-*

*nation before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.*" It is clear, based on these verses, that Sodom was destroyed for a wide range of sins, such as pride and a blatant disregard for the poor and needy. However, we can also clearly and easily understand from God's Word that another sin contributed to Sodom's destruction - the sin of sexual immorality.

Recounting the reason for Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction, Jude explains, "*Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire*" (**Jude 7**). As if the original account in **Gen. 19:1-24** was not already abundantly clear that these people committed sexual immorality through acts of homosexuality, **Jude 7** verifies this eternal truth. Thus, Sodom was, in fact, guilty of homosexuality, which - along with their pride and disregard for the needy - contributed to their utter destruction by God.

## CONCLUSION

Sodom fell to various temptations, and the Bible is clear they were guilty of homosexuality. Homosexuality was a transgression of the Law of Moses (**Lev. 18:22; 20:13**) and continues to stand in contrast to Christ's law under the New Testament today (**1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; Rom. 1:26-27; Rev. 21:8**). Let us learn from the example of Sodom, who were described as "*great sinners against the Lord*" (**Gen. 13:13**), committing "*very grave*" sins (**Gen. 18:20**). Let us all resist the temptations to grow prideful and ignore the needs of the poor, as well as resist the sin of homosexuality.

# Individual Action vs Church Action

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The main argument used to justify church support and involvement in human institutions is that there is no distinction between the church and the individual. According to this position, the church consists of individuals, so when an individual acts, the church acts. Therefore, whatever individuals can do or contribute their money towards, supposedly the church can do the same. However, **Matt. 18:15-17** and **1 Tim. 5:3-16** show this position is false.

Jesus said in **Matt. 18:15-17**, *“More-over if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”* Here, we have a situation where one Christian sins against another. The wronged brother, in this case, is to go to the brother in error and tell him his fault (individual action). If this fails, he is to take with him one or two other Christians to try and get the erring one to repent (group action). If this also fails, he is

to tell it to the church, and if the efforts of the church fail (church action), then he is to be as a *“heathen man and a publican.”* The first two steps involve the action of Christians, but do not include “church action.” It is not until the third step that we have “church action.” Thus, an individual Christian can pursue a course of action and it is not the same as the church acting. Paul makes the same distinction between individual and church action in **1 Tim. 5:3-16** where there is a discussion of the *“widow indeed”* (KJV). A Christian widow’s family has the first responsibility to help her if she is need (**see v.4, 8, 16**). If the widow’s family is able to help, then the church is not to *“be burdened”* (**v.16**). Therefore, individual Christians can act in helping a needy widow and, if they do, the church is not acting. **In fact, this passage teaches us there are responsibilities the individual Christian has been given by God specifically so the church does not have to become involved.**

To be clear, the church absolutely does have a responsibility in benevolence, but its responsibility is limited. The early church helped needy saints, meaning Christians (**see Acts 2:41-45, 4:32-37, 6:1-7, 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Cor. 8:4, 9:1,12; 1 Tim. 5:16**). Whereas the church’s responsibility in benevolence is limited to aiding needy saints, the individual’s responsibility is not limited whatsoever (**see Gal. 6:10; James 1:27; Gal. 2:10; Matt. 25:40-43**). As individuals, we have a great responsibility to help those in need and we need to be busy in this good work, but this good work is the individual Christian’s responsibility and not the church’s responsibility.

## Correct Application of Matthew 18

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It happens again and again. Some brother or sister becomes involved in a sinful activity and it quickly reaches the level of “common knowledge.” Many people know about it, and some that lack a conscience about gossiping begin to have a “hay day” with this information. Finally, one or more concerned brethren learn of it and take steps toward correcting the sinful situation. For their efforts they are criticized and blamed for not following proper “procedure.” Specifically, they are charged with having not followed the steps set forth in **Matt. 18**. Here is the text at issue:

*“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican” (Matt. 18:15-17).*

Please observe that the situation Jesus describes here involves a personal matter - known only by the brother who had been wronged and the one who committed the wrong. Clearly, it was not a sin against a group of people, and it was not a sin that was publicly known. The scenario our Lord sets forth was very specific. In cases where these specifics are met, this method must be followed. But, what about situations where a Christian sins a sin which is not directed towards any certain individual, and the sin immediately becomes publicly known? In such instances, **Matt. 18** does not apply. Instead, we would be correct in following the pattern set by the apostle Paul in **Gal. 2**. When Peter was guilty of open hypocrisy, Paul said, “I withstood him to the face . . . I said unto Peter before them all” (v.11-14). Public sins are a different matter; **Matt. 18** does not fit. Unfortunately, it is often used to deflect criticism away from the true offender and towards the concerned brethren who are trying to do the right thing. **Think!**



# Suppose I Was Born a Muslim?

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## INTRODUCTION

Several times during our evangelistic trips as gospel preachers, while moving from house to house in an effort to fulfill the Great Commission – a method known by some as “door-knocking” or “door-to-door,” we have approached people with a view to introducing the gospel of Christ to them and merely seeing the Bible in our hands, the response that usually welcomes us is “I am a Muslim.” Such a response is intended to stop the preacher from making any further effort to tell them anything about Christ. (It should be noted that not all Muslims behave in this manner as some would actually listen to you and ask questions).

Recently, while speaking to an ex-Muslim turned denominational church member on the necessity of baptism for salvation, and after showing incontrovertible passages of scriptures that teach baptism is for (in order to obtain) salvation, he concluded that I am teaching what I have been taught in “my church” and that if I was born a Muslim like he was, I would understand that it is not easy to have been converted from Islam to Christianity (Indeed, within the few years of his conversion from Islam, he had been taught and had swallowed the denominational sentiment that “faith alone” saves and that baptism is just an action to be done after one is saved). I hinted that the sincerity that made him dump Islam for another religion should make him see reasons to believe the word of God (the Bible) since he claims he is now a Christian. Often Muslim folks have suggested that if I was born a Muslim, by now, I will be promoting Islam and that the reason why I

am so zealous about the Christian religion is that I was born a Christian. Well, let us get down to business.

## NATURAL/PHYSICAL BIRTH DOES NOT MAKE ONE A CHRISTIAN

In the first place, I do not believe that natural birth makes one a Christian. By natural birth, we mean giving birth to a child by a pregnant woman who is due for delivery. And so, we are referring to someone who is physically given birth to and raised by Christian parents. It is true that I may have been born by Christian parents into a family of Christians but that in itself does not make me or anyone a Christian.

In **John 3:3-5**, Jesus taught that a man must be “*born again*” to be eligible to enter God’s kingdom. Nicodemus was confused about this birth and conflated it with the natural birth process but Jesus told him that this new birth involves two elements – water and the Spirit and except a man undergoes this birth process, he cannot see the kingdom of God. All living people today came to the world through the first kind of birth but those who desired to come to God and have everlasting life at the end (thereby avoiding the second death – **Rev. 21:8**) must undergo the rebirth process once they reach the age of accountability and have heard the gospel. The choice is theirs to make. It is after one has gone through these steps that he can be said to be a Christian.

The name “Christian” is mentioned three times in the New Testament (**Acts 11:26; 26:28** and **1 Peter 4:16**) and it refers to a person or people who actually accepted

Christ by obedience to the gospel. It refers to those who have believed the gospel, repented of their sins, confessed their faith in Christ, and are baptized in water for the forgiveness of their sins (**Acts 2:38**). Such would then be added to the church (**Acts 2:36-47**). Regardless of his age at the time of his baptism, when one is born again, the Bible calls such “a newborn babe” that should desire the sincere milk of the word that he may grow thereby (**1 Peter 2:2**). But it seems that certain world religions regard someone as a member or belonging to such a religious group if and when such is born into such religion. Like Islam, it seems one born by Muslim parents and taught to recite the Shahada (“I testify that there is no other god but Allah, and I testify that Muhammed is Allah’s messenger”) is already considered a Muslim. But even if that is the case, the fact that one is born into a religion that recognizes one as a member without his or her own choice should not make one dogmatic. The Jews were so deep-rooted in Judaism and became legalistic that they were not ready to hear about another religion even when their own prophets had spoken about Christ and His work. One could wonder why King Agrippa said he was “almost persuaded” to become a Christian after hearing such an excellent and mind-blowing speech from Paul the apostle (**Acts 26:28**).



## PARENTAL UPBRINGING/INFLUENCE

It is true that parental upbringing and the environment that one is bred could greatly affect the religion one practices. The training given to children will have a huge impact on them. The Bible says; “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (**Prov. 22:6 cf. Eph. 6:4**). Indeed, if anyone follows this biblical instruction and brings up his child in the way he should go, such child, properly brought up will not depart. It appears that the Lord would see the parent as incompetent if the children are unruly, hence, a man whose kids are wayward cannot serve as an elder in the church of the Lord (**1 Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 1:6**).

A parent, whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Pagan, etc. who brings up his or her child properly will raise godly kids. Timothy’s mother was a Jewess and his father was a Gentile (**Acts 16:1**). Yet, he had the proper upbringing (**2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15**). Cornelius was not a Christian and he was neither a Jew. Islam was not in existence at that time, so he was not even a Muslim but he had been taught to fear God (**Acts 10:1-3**). The same thing with religious values; a child who has been raised by Christian or Muslim parents and has been taught to follow such religious requirements is most likely to follow suit. However, a sense of reasoning is in every man as man was not made to be robotic but a free moral agent. In fact, such situations should make one search more and find out if such religion he finds himself is the right place to be. Like the Holy Book of God instructs; we are to “prove all things” and “hold fast that which is good” (**1 Thess. 5:21**). One must examine if the faith he professes is the true one. A faith or religion that would not allow for its scrutiny is a faith not

worth having in the first place. Indeed, an unexamined faith is not worth believing. When one is open-minded and not biased against another religion, learning could take place.

### **ONE COULD BE ZEALOUSLY RELIGIOUS WHILE IN ERROR**

It is also true that one could be zealously religious without having the truth and such would continue to progress in error except for someone with the truth guides him. Apostle Paul spoke of Israel as a people having a zeal for God but not according to knowledge (**Rom. 10:1-3**). The same Paul, at a time, was zealously religious in Judaism that he persecuted the Christians for a while before he was converted. In his words; *"I persecuted this Way unto death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women"* (**Acts 22:4**). He actually thought he was fighting a good cause for God but he was actually trying to fight against Him and it was really difficult for Paul to *"kick against the pricks"* (**Acts 9:5, KJV**). Furthermore, I have known and read of certain individuals who were devoted Muslims and who have served "Allah" for many years but later accepted Christ and came out publicly to declare that they are now Christians through their writings and other publications. Some of these individuals risked their lives and lost physical or material benefits that should come while others were even disowned by their parents simply because they left Islam and embraced Christianity. These individuals took their decisions after much patient learning/study of the Bible in contrast with what they have believed.

### **CONCLUSION**

Sincerity is demanded from everyone! One could be convinced of a particular thing if and when he is open-minded. The

Ethiopian eunuch was sincere enough to admit that he did not understand the scriptures he was reading even when he was a religious man (**Acts 8:27-31** – he had come to Jerusalem to worship). He was also sincere enough to listen to Philip as he preached Jesus to him beginning from that same scripture he was reading (**v.35**). He was sincere to point to water and made a request to be baptized (**vs.36-37**). Why then should anyone not be sincere enough to listen to God's message when it is being preached to him simply because he thinks he already knows it? Not many people have the fortitude to swim against the swelling current of mediocrity and the status quo. They are already satisfied with their state and religion and feel they do not need anything else. Once a person's mind is closed about a thing, he would hardly welcome other ideas but once one is open-minded, he will be able to see the truth when presented. Let us be open-minded. Meanwhile, suppose I was born a Muslim and I have the opportunity to listen to God's word taught by faithful Christians and I am receptive to understand it, I will become a Christian. The gospel is God's power to save man (**Rom. 1:16**) and it is still living and active (**Heb. 4:12**).

### **SWORD SWIPES**

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

**If you want to weaken, decrease, or altogether lose your faith, just stop reading your Bible.**

***"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom. 10:17).**  
**(DTS)**

## How to Judge a Sermon

PAT DONAHUE | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

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It's a common practice after a worship assembly for people to discuss the merits of the sermon just delivered. Many times there is agreement about whether the lesson was a good one, but every now and then there is disagreement. It seems people judge a sermon based upon different criteria. Just what does make a good sermon? Let's go to the Bible to find out.

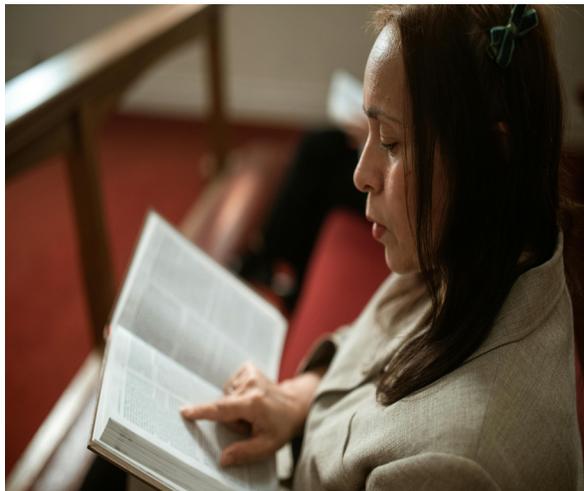
Most people judge a sermon based upon how good a job of speaking the preacher did. When discussing the sermon they talk about the style – “he yells to much,” “he doesn't preach with a strong enough voice,” “you know he is sincere because he cries just about every sermon” (think Jimmy Swaggart in yesteryear), “he shows too much emotion when he preaches,” etc. The Bible teaches that this is not the way to judge a sermon. Who wouldn't agree that Paul was an effective preacher? Yet Paul himself states in **1 Cor. 2:1** that he declared the testimony of God, “*not with excellency of speech.*” How good a speaker the preacher is, has no bearing on how good his sermon is, according to the Bible.

A lot of times people judge a sermon based upon the wisdom (man's wisdom) that they perceive was expressed by the speaker. One comment to a speaker after a lesson went like this once, “you used too much scriptures references and not enough of your own ideas.” A casual reading of **1 Cor. 1:17-2:5, 13** shows this is not a good criteria upon which to judge a sermon. Notice especially Paul's statement in **1 Cor 2:4**, “*And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*” How then should we judge a sermon? Let the Bible suggest to us three points.

**The truth must be preached.** Only the truth sets us free from sin (**John 8:32**), not error. Christians are commanded to speak “*the truth in love*” (**Eph. 4:15**). If a Christian preaches anything but the gospel that Paul preached, “*let him be accursed*” (**Gal. 1:8**).

**Many Bible verses must be used in the sermon.** Paul told Timothy to “*preach the word*” (**2 Tim. 4:2**) not his own stories and jokes. **Rom. 1:16** tells us “*the gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation,*” not good speeches. If the scripture itself is not read and taught, where does that leave God's power? True faith only comes from hearing God's word (**Rom. 10:17**). The scriptures themselves are the only thing profitable for doctrine (**2 Tim. 3:16**). How could we say a man is speaking “*as the oracles of God*” (**1 Pet. 4:11**) when he delivers a forty minute sermon and only refers to an oracle of God once or twice? Read **Acts 2:14-36** and

**Acts 7:2-53** and notice how often inspired preachers made reference to the scriptures in their sermons. And if men whose very speeches became scriptures saw fit to quote the Bible so often, how much more should the uninspired Christians of today use the actual texts of the Bible in their lessons.



If the truth is preached, and many Bible verses are used, it should go without saying that **the passages given should be used to backup the truth that is preached.** Apollos “*mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ*” (**Acts 18:28**). Paul didn’t just assert that things were so, he proved it (**Acts 9:22**). How can a listener “*prove*”, or test a sermon if the speaker doesn’t prove what he says by the scriptures (**1 Thess. 5:21**)? Have you ever wondered why some preachers read a verse and then proceed to talk about everything else under the sun except the passage read? Notice in **Neh. 8:8** that the sense of the passages read was given, not a great explanation for the different experiences in the preacher’s past life. Commandments without proper scriptural support are simply “*commandments of men*” (**Matt. 15:9**) and nothing more. Unless verses are given, how would a listener

know if the teaching was from heaven, or from men (**Matt. 21:25**)? A listener would certainly be under no obligation to obey such teaching (**2 Thess. 1:8**). Even if he did, he would be obeying man’s word, not God’s. So if a preacher doesn’t prove what he teaches by God’s word, we should “let it go through one ear and out the other.”

### CONCLUSION

Let’s remember what’s important and what’s not. God’s word is what counts and not “*good words [or good ideas of men] and fair speeches*” (**Rom. 16:18**). The next time you are shaking a preacher’s hand after his sermon, don’t tell him it was a good sermon unless the lesson was filled with Bible passages proving the truth of God.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**The New English Translation (NET, Thomas Nelson Full Notes Edition) includes the following footnote discussing the figurative language that appears in Isaiah 14:12:**

“What is the background for the imagery in vv. 12-15? This whole section (vv. 4b-21) is directed to the king of Babylon, who is clearly depicted as a human ruler. Other kings of the earth address him in vv. 9ff., he is called “the man” in v. 16, and, according to vv. 19-20, he possesses a physical body. Nevertheless the language of vv. 12-15 has led some to see a dual referent in the taunt song . . . The king of Babylon is taunted for having . . . unrealized delusions of grandeur. Some Christians have seen an allusion to the fall of Satan here, but this seems contextually unwarranted.”

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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

### Feet Washing

CARROL R. SUTTON

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It has been suggested by some that the washing of the feet of guests (by the host) was a custom practiced in “Bible times” to show hospitality. However, a careful study of the Scriptures does not seem to necessarily substantiate that claim.

We learn from **Exod. 30:17-21** and **Exod. 40:30-32** that provisions were made for Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and their feet when they ministered as priests. Of course, this had nothing to do with showing hospitality. In **1 Sam. 25:40-41** (in about B.C. 1060) we do read where Abigail said to the servants of David, “*Let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.*” This, no doubt, indicates humility but it may not necessarily indicate simply a matter of showing hospitality. We also read in **Luke 7:36-50** that a sinful woman washed the feet of Jesus with tears, wiped them with the hairs of her head, kissed them and anointed them with ointment. This indicates much love for Jesus, not merely showing hospitality.

A careful consideration of **Gen. 18:1-18**; **Gen. 19:1-2**; **Gen. 24:32**; **Gen. 43:24** and **Jdgs. 19:16-21** will show that water was provided by the hosts to their guests to enable the guests to wash their own feet! THE HOSTS DID NOT WASH THE FEET OF THE GUESTS! It seems that it may have been customary for the host to provide water for the guest so the guest could wash his OWN feet. **NOTE:** In **Luke 7:44** Jesus said to Simon, “*Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine*



*house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.” Obviously the woman went beyond what was ordinarily practiced. **The evidence is lacking that proves that the washing of the feet of the guest by the host was a custom that was practiced in “Bible times.”***

Please read carefully **John 13:1-17**. In this passage we have a record of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Their feet were dirty, hence needed washing. Jesus washed their feet, fulfilling a need, as an act of humility. It was NOT a mere custom, formality nor merely a “religious rite.” It was an act of service designed to teach a needed lesson on humility! Jesus said: *“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” (v.14-15)*. Observe the fact that Jesus did NOT say that disciples ought to wash one another’s feet AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP IN THE PUBLIC ASSEMBLY OF THE SAINTS! He simply said the disciples should follow His example and do to each other as He had done to them.

“Feet washing” is mentioned one time after the ascension of Christ and the beginning of the church on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in **Acts 2**. It is NOT mentioned in connection with any act of public worship. It is mentioned in connection with a widow meeting certain qualifications in order for her to *“be taken into the number”* or *“enrolled.”* Paul said: *“Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, IF SHE HAVE WASHED THE SAINTS’ FEET, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work” (1 Tim. 5:9-10)*. We can readily see that “washing the saints’ feet” is in the same category as other “good works” such

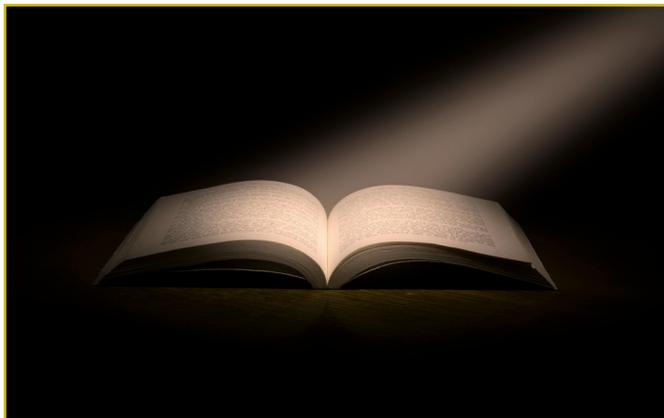
as rearing children, lodging strangers and relieving the afflicted. NONE of these “good works” are acts of worship to be performed in the public assemblies! They are private, individual duties (and privileges) that are fulfilled without public fanfare. Devotion to God and love for others will prompt disciples to engage in such “good works.” We have no right to take any of these “good works” and make them acts of public assembly worship.

In washing the disciples’ feet Jesus not only fulfilled a need, but He also manifested humility and in so doing taught the early disciples (and us) a needed lesson on humility. We should be willing and humble enough to fulfill any duty and perform any needed service! Are you?

## **ILLUSTRATIONS**

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

**Picture this: You’re pulling out your driveway and as you pass by your neighbor’s house you see his house is on fire. Instead of stopping to help, you keep driving, allowing the house to burn down. That’s essentially what Christians do when we don’t share the gospel with people who are lost in sin. Remember: *“Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh” (Jude 21-23, ESV)*. If we want to keep ourselves in the love of God, we must be diligent in trying to snatch people out of the fire! (DTS)**



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