

The Whole Counsel of God

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EDITOR: Dylan Stewart
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA USA

www.thegoodnewsofgod.org

"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 SEPT. 2024

It is with great joy we present the first edition in our second volume of ***The Whole Counsel of God***. We hope the contents of this month's journal will be of great spiritual benefit for all who read it.

Articles included in this edition present questions such as *No Authority for Church Buildings!?!*, *How Do You View Sin?*, *Is it Wrong to Teach Topical Bible Lessons*, and *Is the Faithful Saint Continually Cleansed?* Additionally, two articles discussing the role of government/police enforcement and some concerns about governmental



mandates in schools emphasizing certain aspects of scripture are presented for your consideration. Please carefully consider the messages contained within each article.

I also would like to add a friendly reminder that we continue publishing articles every Saturday morning (8:00 AM, US CT) to the **Bible Blog**. If the Lord wills, we plan to keep up this schedule, as we have done now for the past two years. If you are not subscribed to the **Bible Blog**, you may click [here](#) to sign up for email notifications alerting you every time a new article is posted.

Lastly, the website has been updated to include a **Tracts** page. Here, I have included links to tracts written by various brethren on subjects such as fasting, a second serving of the Lord's Supper, a verse-by-verse study of **1 Cor. 11:2-16**, and angels. Also included on this page is a tract I personally wrote on the subject of mental divorce. These tracts are all very lengthy reads, so I recommend reading across multiple sessions rather than trying to tackle one of them in just one sitting. If you are interested in examining any of these subjects, you may click [here](#). I pray this information will be beneficial to you.

Thank you for all the encouragement you provide, both in our conversations with each other and in how you strive to live faithfully before our God. May God continue to keep us all in His care and under His loving provision.

(DTS)

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The Whole Counsel of God is published bi-monthly. All correspondences should be submitted via the **Contact Form** found [here](#).

For previous editions of *The Whole Counsel of God*, visit www.thegoodnewsofgod.org.

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No Authority for Church Buildings!?!

GREG GWIN | TENNESSEE, UNITED STATES

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“We all do lots of things that we don’t have authority for.” That’s a response some of our brethren use when we challenge them to produce authority for the innovations that they have introduced into the work and worship of the church. For instance, we might ask them for “book, chapter, and verse” for their fellowship halls, church kitchens, and gymnasiums. Or, we may request a scriptural explanation for their support of human institutions, the sponsoring church arrangement, or other “missionary society” type organizations. “What about church buildings,” they will continue, “there’s no authority for church buildings, but we have them anyway.”

Let us try, once again, to put an end to this fruitless line of argumentation. First of all, do not forget that we **MUST** have Bible authority for everything we say and do. Paul commanded that *“whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of [by the authority of] the Lord Jesus”* (Col. 3:17). To act without scriptural authority is a sin. Therefore, if there truly is no authority for church buildings, then the right thing to do is to get rid of the buildings and repent that we ever had them. We definitely should NOT use one wrong thing to

justify doing other wrong things. Would you tell the thief that, since he’s already a sinner, he might as well go out and commit murder? Of course not! But that is exactly the perverted “logic” of those who use this church building argument. In truth, there **IS** authority for church buildings. The authority is inherent in the command to worship (**Heb. 10:25**). Since we are told to assemble, there must be a place for such assembly. Since the Word does not specify where to meet, we must employ sound judgment and good stewardship in making an expedient decision about a meeting place (**1 Cor. 10:23**). This is much like the command to *“go into all the world and preach the gospel”* (**Mark 16:15**). We **MUST** “go” but the Lord did not specify **HOW** to go. Therefore we might choose to drive, fly, use the radio, etc. Expedient judgments are inherent in general (non-specific) commands.

Our brethren have missed it when they make this “no authority for church buildings” argument. But they are, in fact, admitting the sinfulness of their practices. **Think!**

SWORD SWIPES

“Shun profane and vain babblings”
(2 Tim. 2:16a, KJV)

Technology will always get better and better, but wickedness will not.

“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13).

(DTS)

How Do You View Sin?

MIKE JOHNSON | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED MAY 2016 IN SEEKING THINGS ABOVE

In our society today, there is often acceptance of sin. In the past, however, shame was often associated with sin. Today, it is common for people to openly engage in sinful practices, not even attempting to hide them. For example, although now prevalent, a couple living together was called “living in sin.” However, in the past, a couple would date, get engaged, and then marry. Today, a couple will date, live together for a while, and then maybe become engaged and get married. Many view sins as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, immodest dress, lying, and stealing as acceptable.

God reveals the accurate picture of sin in His Word. In **James 1:21**, the writer points out the need to “*lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness.*” From this verse, sin has the description of “*filthiness.*” We should look at sin as one would look at a filthy rag, looking upon it as disgusting and sickening. Further, according to the passage, we should stop committing all transgressions.

Note also **2 Pet. 2**, which speaks of those who, according to the context, had become Christians but turned back to sin. **Verse 22** describes them in this way: “*But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’*” This scene is not pretty.

Another passage to consider is **Isa. 5:20**, which says, “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*” A person

can call evil good, but that does not mean it is. A person may call darkness light and speak of bitter as sweet, but merely calling it such does not change its true nature. Abraham Lincoln once said, “If you call a tail a leg, how many legs does a horse have? Four, calling a tail a leg does not make it a leg.” Similarly, calling evil good does not change it at all.

Incorrect labels can produce devastating effects. A container with poison needs proper labels. A poison with no name on the container is dangerous. Mislabeled poison is even more hazardous. A bag with poison, for example, labeled as “sugar,” could produce tragic results. The same principle applies to sin.

Isa. 59:1-2 makes it clear sin separates us from God. **Rom. 3:23** says, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” **Rom. 6:23** reveals, “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

How do you view sin?



Commandments in the Classroom

BRYAN DOCKENS | NEW MEXICO, UNITED STATES
PUBLISHED JUN. 2024 IN **WHOLE COUNSEL** (Vol. 2, No. 26)



Many social conservatives in America are applauding a recently passed Louisiana law mandating that the Ten Commandments be conspicuously posted in all public school classrooms throughout the Pelican State. While it is very good for Scripture to be seen and read, Christians should be hesitant to celebrate this legislation.

THE FORCE OF LAW IS A POOR SUBSTITUTE FOR EVANGELISM

Civil authorities have been ordained by God for two specific reasons: *“for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good”* (1 Pet. 2:14; cf. Rom. 13:3-4). It is not the State, but the church which God has established for disseminating the truth of His word: *“The manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church”* (Eph. 3:10; cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). These roles must not be conflated.

During the first century, when the gospel made the most impact on a given society, no level of government contributed to the success. After Paul and Silas converted a multitude in Thessalonica (Acts 17:3), unbelievers stirred up a persecution and ac-

cused the preachers of having *“turned the world upside down”* (v.6). Yet, all Paul and Silas had done was preach three Saturdays in the synagogue (v.1-3). The only role filled by *“the rulers of the city”* was to hear the accusations (v.8) and make the new disciples in Thessalonica pay bail (v.9). The gospel was changing the world, the people knew it, and the government helped in no way whatsoever. The church and its members can still change the world by the message of Christ’s salvation without outsourcing to the legislature and Governor.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS BELONG TO AN OBSOLETE COVENANT

If the church would work to publicly display a brief list of God’s intent for morality, it would be better to post the *“fruit of the Spirit”* (Gal. 5:22-23), the *“armor of God”* (Eph. 6:10-17), or the so-called *“beatitudes”* (Matt. 5:3-12) because these remain valid within the New Testament.

The decalogue is a list of highlights from the Law of Moses, which Law has since been replaced. Jesus asserted, *“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time*

the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it (Luke 16:16). And Paul explained that *“Christ is the end of the law”* (Rom. 10:4). Although the previous covenant can be learned from (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11), it is no longer applicable law (Col. 2:14).

Of the Ten Commandments, nine remain in effect under the law of Christ, but one is void.

- *“You shall have no other gods before Me”* (Exod. 20:3) still stands (Matt. 6:24).
- So does *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image”* (Exod. 20:4-6; Acts 17:29).
- *“You shall not take the name of Jehovah your God in vain”* (Exod. 20:7) is no less valid now than it was then (Phil. 2:9-11).
- *“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Jehovah your God is giving you”* (Exod. 20:12) is repeated in the New Testament with special emphasis given to its attendant promise (Eph. 6:1-3).
- *“You shall not murder”* (Exod. 20:13) is still true (Rev. 21:8).
- So is *“You shall not commit adultery”* (Exod. 20:14; Heb. 4:13).
- *“You shall not steal”* (Exod. 20:15) has not changed (Eph. 4:28).
- *“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”* (Exod. 20:16) abides (Rom. 13:9).
- And *“You shall not covet”* (Exod. 20:17) remains in effect (Heb. 13:5).

The Commandment which expired when Christ changed the law (Heb. 7:12) is *“Remember the Sabbath day”* (Exod. 20:8). That one must not be enforced now (Col. 2:16). The true rest given by God is one that awaits in eternity (Heb. 4:9-10). Since one tenth of the Ten Commandments is no longer in force, it is misguided to place so much emphasis on them.

EDITOR’S NOTE:

I strongly agree with brother Dockens’ conclusion on this subject and feel compelled to add an additional thought as to why we should not jump to celebrate government legislation requiring the scriptures to be posted or taught in public schools.

I cannot possibly think of a worse source for teaching the word of God than the government through the public education system. Why so many Christians are seemingly excited to have strangers influence their children’s view of God’s word is, frankly, deeply concerning. No Christian should be excited at the prospect of their child being taught the word of God by someone who is almost assuredly a denominational, agnostic, or athiest school teacher.

Fathers have been commanded to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). This is not to suggest that educators do not play a role in the mental and sometimes spiritual development in children’s lives. However, parents must not shun their God-given duty in raising their children properly, nor should they be excited at the prospect of someone else taking on that responsibility. (DTS)

Body-Shaming Jesus

DAVID DIESTELKAMP | ILLINOIS, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED JAN. 2024 IN **THINK ON THESE THINGS** (VOL. 55, No. 1)

Your body is imperfect, flawed, scarred, ugly, too ____ (something inadequate) and, therefore so are you! This is body-shaming: the act of humiliating someone because of some aspect of his/her body. Most people accept that body-shaming is harmful and needs to stop, but it still happens a lot to Jesus without apology.



UNBELIEVERS

The prophecy in **Isaiah 53:3-5** says that Jesus would be “*despised and rejected by men*” and is still true today. Jesus, the Head of the body (**Col. 1:18**), is shamed as His name, that is above all names (**Phil. 2:9**), is used as a mindless interjection and curse. Everything about Him is “*despised and rejected by men*”— His historicity, His teaching, His miracles, His death, His resurrection, His reign, His authority, and His return. He is shamed and blasphemed without hesitation.

Jesus warned that if He is “*despised and rejected by men*” (hated and persecuted – **John 15:18-25**), His followers (His body) will be, too. How does the body endure shaming? It knows, “*The wise shall*

inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools” (**Prov. 3:35**). Unbelievers, “*whose glory is their shame — who set their mind on earthly things*” (**Phil. 3:19**), shame Christ and His body but will inherit shame themselves. Those who are spiritually wise will inherit glory “*when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe*” (**2 Thess. 1:10**). His body rejoices that it is “*worthy to suffer shame for His name*” (**Acts 5:41**), knowing that, in the end, “*whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame*” (**Rom. 9:33**).

BELIEVERS

Believers know Jesus as “*the brightness of [God’s] glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (**Heb. 1:3**). Believers know that they “*were called in one body*” (**Col. 3:15**); and yet, some believers body-shame Jesus.

Members of the body know that their mission is the “*edifying of the body of Christ*” (**Eph. 4:12**), but some are often tempted to tear it down and shame it. It begins by members not respecting and “*not holding fast to the Head*” (**Col. 1:19**). Actions that ignore and degrade the authority and direction of the Head (Jesus) also dishonor, disrespect, and shame Him.

Tolerating immorality shames the body of Christ and gives cause for blaspheming Him (**1 Cor. 5:1-8**; **1 Tim. 6:1**; **Tit. 2:5**). False teaching brings blasphemy to the way of truth (**2 Pet. 2:1-3**). The words and actions

of members of the body of Christ must not invite shaming of Christ and His body.

Believers are often tempted to shame other body members with harsh words, condemnation, disunity, refusal to forgive, lack of love, selfishness, prejudice, devaluing various gifts and positions in the body, dishonoring poor brothers and sisters, etc. If believers aren't treating other believers as those for whom Christ died, they are

both shaming their brothers and shaming Christ and His grace.

Believers are *"looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Heb. 12:2). Jesus despised and bore the shame of the cross. It's past time for body-shaming Jesus to stop.

MYTH BUSTERS

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

"They do not love that do not show their love" (William Shakespeare).

One of the biggest misconceptions about love is that it is merely a strong feeling of fondness or devotion. While love certainly involves strong feelings, the Bible tells us that true love goes beyond mere feelings. Biblical love is a love that acts, it does something.

Because God loved the world, He gave His only Son (John 3:16). Because a husband loves his wife, he is to give himself for her and treat her as he would his own self (Eph. 5:25-29) and a wife shows true love to her husband by being submissive and respectful (Eph. 5:22-33). Because parents love their children, they raise them to serve God above all else (Eph. 6:4) and they discipline them when needed just as God disciplines us as His children when we need it, because He loves us (Heb. 12:5-11). If you truly love your neighbor, you will love him/her as yourself, even putting their needs above your own (Rom. 12:9; Phil. 2:3-4). Jesus even tells us to love our enemies and to show it by doing good for them and praying for them (Luke 6:27-36). Sometimes we show our love by rebuking those who have gone into sin. It isn't pleasant, but to sit by and not try to pull them out of the fire would be tantamount to hatred. The bottom line is this: Our Lord calls upon us to love everyone and that love must be shown by action.

We can say we have love and we can say we have faith, but James reminds us that "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17) Let us show our love today through whatever actions are necessary, whatever it is that those in our lives need.

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

(Jody Lusk | Alabama, United States, June 2024)

Law Enforcement: God's Design and My Duty

STEVE KLEIN | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED JUN. 2020 IN [TEACHINGGOODTHINGS](#)

Throughout the Bible narrative, the role of civil authorities is often on display. Misuse of power is commonly seen, exposed, and condemned from Genesis to Revelation. Principles of justice and equity laid down in Scripture form the foundation of the better parts of our legal system even today. God's purpose for civil law, and His expectation that His people submit to it, is also often expressed in Scripture. No passage is clearer on that subject than **Rom. 13:1-7**. Please read the text carefully, noting the words I've highlighted in bold, and then consider a few thoughts with me: ***"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."***

All of us are to submit to the governing authorities because they are appointed

by God. To disobey them is to disobey God — unless their law would compel one to disobey God's law (**Acts 5:29**). God's intention is that rulers make people afraid to do bad things. They are to be *"a terror"* to evil-doing. They carry lethal weapons for a reason. They are there to protect good people from bad people. Do they always do that? No. Law enforcement is sometimes corrupt and oppressive. Paul was well aware of that as he writes the epistle to the Romans. Had he not been beaten and thrown in jail by civil authorities in Philippi (**Acts 16:22-23**)? Had he not witnessed the Roman proconsul Gallio fail to lift a finger against blatant violence and injustice in Corinth (**Acts 18:11-17**)? Wasn't Nero, one of the most inhumane rulers in human history, sitting on the throne of Rome at this time? Yet, by inspiration of God, he says *"you must be subject"* to the governing authorities. And the apostle Peter, writing in this same time period, tells Christians to *"honor the king"* (**1 Pet. 2:17**). But not only are we to be subject to and honor civil law enforcement, we are to pay our taxes to support it! The reason given in God's word for paying taxes is to support civil law enforcement.

God's word is a sharp two-edged sword that cuts deeply and equally into any person who is not aligned with its truth (**Heb. 4:12-13**). Injustice by law enforcement can and should be reformed by law. Let every Christian get behind that! Failing to fund law enforcement, failing to respect it, taking away its ability to use lethal force, or doing away with it altogether must not be supported by any God-fearing person.

The Six Antitheses of Matthew 5

DYLAN STEWART | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

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A SERMON DEMANDING EXCEEDING LEVELS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matt. 5-7 contains the Sermon on the Mount. I've heard it stated that these chapters contain the "greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived" (E.R.H.). That is a lofty description, but it really is kind of hard to argue when you get right down to it. I suppose one might contend that Peter's sermon on Pentecost in **Acts 2** was the more effective sermon since it managed to prick the hearts of 3,000 people, including those who bore direct responsibility for crucifying the Messiah. However, when we consider the many direct implications the Sermon on Mount has on each individual person desiring to follow Christ, it is rather hard to argue that there ever has been more a demanding sermon requiring intense self-examination and change on the part of the listener. After all, Jesus flatly states that a New Testament Christian is required to live on a higher moral plane than those who lived under the Law of Moses: "*Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall*

be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (**Matt. 5:19-20**). That means our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of a devout Pharisee (like Saul of Tarsus). Talk about a high bar!

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IS PART OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

During the Sermon on the Mount we see Jesus presenting His gospel message on numerous topics which directly contradicted the views of those to whom He was preaching. These contradictions were caused by Jesus preaching the gospel and not just rehashing the Law of Moses.

Matt. 5-7 is part of the gospel, meaning, it is intended for application by Christians in every age. We know this because in **Matt. 4:23a** the Spirit records, "*And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom.*" Then, in **Matt. 5:1**, we also see that Jesus preached this sermon to "*His disciples.*" Therefore, it is clear that Jesus's sermon was not something strictly limited in application to the first century, neither was it just intended for the Jews, nor was this message – as many gospel preachers claim – just Jesus correcting misunderstandings of the Law of Moses. Rather, this sermon was intended to provide lessons for the Lord's disciples in the first century and in every age to come.

PREPARATORY TEACHING

Many wonder how we could contend that Jesus would teach New Testament law while the Old Testament law was still in effect. We might identify Jesus's teaching here as "preparatory" teaching, or teaching that would be binding at a future time and not at the time it was preached because the death of the Testator (Jesus) had not taken place yet. This is exactly what the Hebrew writer argues in **Heb. 9:16-17**: "*For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.*" The New Testament law did not go into effect until AFTER Jesus died, when Jesus figuratively nailed the Law of Moses to the cross with Him (**Col. 2:14**), but that did not stop Him from teaching preparatory things.

John 3:3-5 serves as a good example of Jesus doing preparatory teaching. Water baptism being necessary for salvation did not become binding until after Jesus died (**Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19-20**), yet Jesus started preaching on baptism as early as **John 3**: "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" (**v.5**). Another example of preparatory teaching is found in **Matt. 18:15-17**, where Jesus preached on matters of church discipline even though the church was not even in existence yet: "*Moreover 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." These commands, like a large portion of

the Sermon on the Mount, were preparatory in nature and not mandated as law until after Christ died (**Matt. 5:17-18**).

SIX CONTRASTS

Throughout **Matt. 5**, a recurring statement appears six times in **v. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, & 43**. In these verses, Jesus says something to the effect of, "*It has been said . . . But I say unto you,*" or "*You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . But I say unto you.*" The repetition of this thought highlights six contrasts between the Law of Moses and Christ's New Testament law which would replace the Old Law. In all six instances, Jesus quotes exactly or accurately represents an Old Testament passage in order to introduce His more strict gospel teaching.

CONTRAST #1: SIN CAN EXIST BEFORE PHYSICALLY ACTING

In **v.21-22**, we see our first contrast. Jesus says, "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'* But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." In **Matt. 5:21-22**, Jesus quotes one of the Ten Commandments (**Exod. 20:13**) and appears to paraphrase another Old Testament passage (**Num. 35:12**) to illustrate the point that it's not just wrong to kill someone, but it's wrong to mistreat them, speak ill against them, evilly surmise against them, be angry against them without cause, call them a fool, etc., even without ever acting out against them physically. Simply put, Jesus's New Testament teaching says that sin is present long before a physical act has ever taken place. This point is hammered home in **1 John 3:15a**, which says, "*Whoever hates his*

brother is a murderer.” We see this principle of sin being present long before a physical act occurs in **v.27-29** as well.



CONTRASTS #2-3: MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

In **v.27-29**, the second contrast, Jesus says, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* Again, we have Jesus providing another exact quote of one of the Ten Commandments (**Exod. 20:14**), but He then makes a much stricter declaration. He says if you look at a person with lustful intent then you have already committed adultery with her in your heart. To draw an Old Testament parallel, that means, by Jesus’s law, David was an adulterer (figuratively speaking) long before he ever slept with Bathsheba!

In light of the contrast made in **v.27-29**, does that mean a man can divorce his wife if he knows she lusted (committed adultery in the heart) after another man? While it is certainly a sin to commit adultery in the heart (**v.28**), that sin is not a justifiable reason for a man to divorce his wife. Only adultery in the bed serves as scriptural grounds for divorce (see **Heb. 13:4** & **John 8:3-4**; also consider **Lev. 20:10-13** to see how God defined adultery as the physical/sexual act). Passages like

Matt. 5:31-32 (the next contrast) and **Matt. 19:8-9** are talking about the literal (physical) act of adultery/fornication, which is what we might call “following through” on the lust present in a person’s heart. We see that with the example of David and Bathsheba we mentioned earlier. Under Jesus’s New Testament, David figuratively committed adultery when he saw Bathsheba bathing on the rooftop and sent for her (**2 Sam. 11:2-3**), but he did not actually commit adultery/fornication until the physical act took place (**2 Sam. 11:4**). If David lived under New Testament law, he was guilty of adultery in the heart, but that would not be a satisfactory reason for his spouse to divorce him.

In **v.31-32**, we see a third contrast. Jesus says, *“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”* In **v.31**, Jesus quotes Moses’s law from **Deut. 24:1-4** to explain how if a man desired to divorce his wife for “uncleanness” (something seemingly short of fornication since adulterers were to be stoned [**Lev. 20:10**]), he needed to give her a certificate (official legal document) of divorce. However, Jesus then adds His contrasting teaching stating divorce is no longer permitted unless the spouse commits fornication. Jesus reiterates this point in **Matt. 19:8-9** by admitting Moses did allow (or permit) divorce for reasons other than fornication, but explains that *“from the beginning it was not so.”* Jesus’s New Testament teaching is the same as God instituted in the very beginning, i.e. no divorce (with one exception). Divorce, unless for fornication, is a sin, and if a divorce not for fornication is followed by remarriage, adultery has occurred.



CONTRAST #4: DO NOT SWEAR

In **v.33-36**, we have our fourth contrast. Jesus says, *“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”* Many have interpreted these verses to merely teach that if we vow to do something, we must fulfill that oath. In other words, Christians ought to be true to their word. Even though this principle is certainly supported by the New Testament, that is not what these verses specifically teach because Jesus flatly states here, *“do not swear at all.”* This stands in contrast to Moses’ law which said it was okay to swear but wrong to *“for-swear thyself”* (KJV), or swear to do something and then fail to follow through on that commitment (see **Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Psalm 15:1-4**). The gospel message is much stricter. Swearing is completely forbidden, which would necessarily include even swearing an oath in court. James put it this way: *“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any oth-*

er oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment” (**James 5:12**). James, like Jesus, makes it abundantly clear that there must be no swearing at all.

The essential ingredient in swearing that Jesus condemns in **v.33-36** is adding a guarantee to our word. For example, think about the person who regularly says, “I’ve got to be honest with you . . .” or “I promise I’m telling the truth when I say . . .” or “Trust me . . .” Such guarantees are not needed from a person who keeps his word all the time, right? Why insist you are telling the truth about something when your character should speak to the fact that you always tell the truth? Jesus stresses that the word of a Christian should be such that a “yes” or a “no” carries binding force, and there are no exceptions to the rule that swearing is off limits. Those who take the opposing position on this topic evidently have a very different “translation” of **James 5:12** and **Matt. 5:34**. Instead of *“swear not at all”* (KJV), they apparently have a Bible that reads, *“only swear in certain occasions”* (like in court), but that is certainly not what the verses say. Our word and the character that backs up our words are meant to be sufficient. So, always let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no,” regardless of the circumstance.

CONTRASTS #5-6: NO AUTHORITY TO HARM ANOTHER PERSON

In **v.38-39**, we have the fifth contrast. Jesus says, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”* And in **v.43-48**, we have the sixth and final contrast. Jesus says, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you,*

and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” These two contrasts presents the same general idea: Christians have zero authority to ever inflict harm on another person, whether in retaliation or out of self-defense.

There are several quotes from the Law of Moses here that Jesus uses to illustrate this very basic yet very divisive point that if someone seeks to harm us, we have no right to harm them. The Old Law most certainly taught it was authorized to return violence for violence (**Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Num. 35:19**), and Jesus cites what those verses teach here, but Jesus’s new law absolutely never authorizes violence. Those under the Law of Moses were permitted to hate their enemies (**Deut. 23:3-7; Psalm 26:5, 31:6, 139:21-22**), yet the Law of Christ says “*Love your enemies.*” So, the Law of Christ teaches the exact opposite of what the Law of Moses taught in regards to how we are to view and treat our enemies. As Paul explains, the Christian’s call is this: “*Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome*

evil with good” (**Rom. 12:17-21**). Vengeance is no longer in the hands of man to act upon (whether personal, national, etc.), but strictly belongs to God. We know all vengeance belongs to God and none belongs to man because **Rom. 13:10** teaches, “*Love does no harm to a neighbor.*” Who is our neighbor? **Matt. 5:43-48** tells us our neighbor is anyone in our proximity with whom we can share God’s love (see also **Luke 10:25-37**). After all, love “*thinks no evil*” (**1 Cor. 13:5b**); how can we avoid thinking evil of someone upon whom we inflict violence, even in self-defense?



Jesus left us the perfect example we must follow: “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*” (**1 Pet. 2:21-23**). The Israelites could destroy their enemies (remember what Saul was supposed to do to the Amalekites?), but Christians are to love our enemies, bless them, do good to them, pray for them, and never do them harm. If we do these things, we can be children of God (**Matt. 5:45**); if we do the opposite, however, we won’t be His children. **See why it’s so important that we understand this sermon correctly?**

Is It Wrong to Teach Topical Bible Lessons?

PAT DONAHUE | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES
PUBLISHED DEC. 2017 IN **DOCTRINE MATTERS**

It seems that some are emphasizing textual (expository) sermons so much these days, it's almost like they think to preach a topical sermon would be wrong. But **Isaiah 28:9-10** teaches us that a perfectly valid way of teaching "doctrine" is "*precept must be upon precept . . . line upon line . . . here a little, and there a little.*"

As a matter of fact, almost all of the lessons in the New Testament are topical. For example the most famous sermon in the Bible, Jesus' Sermon On The Mount (**Matt. 5-7**), touches upon a large variety of topics and Old Testament passages. Peter's first gospel sermon in **Acts 2** quotes extensively from at least three different Old Testament texts, but has a common topic throughout – "*Jesus Christ, and him crucified*" (**1 Cor. 2:2**). Peter's **Acts 3** sermon likewise. And just a casual reading of Stephen's **Acts 7** sermon informs us that it references many different Old Testament passages; it is about as far from a one-text expository sermon as you can get.

I've heard some say topical preaching allows the preacher to avoid touchy subjects.

That is true, but so does textual preaching. I once heard a sermon by a "textual only" type preacher on a text that mentioned fasting, but no comment was made concerning Christians fasting today. If a preacher is not intent on preaching "*all the counsel of God*" (**Acts 20:27**), he is going to leave off tackling controversial/needed subjects whether he is preaching topical or textual sermons.

Do I think topical preaching is superior to expository preaching? No way Jose – absolutely not! I think the long-standing custom of using the Bible classes ("Sunday School") for studying assigned texts of the scriptures, and using many of the worship services for topical sermons is a good tradition. That way we get a healthy diet of both types of teaching, with one method not unnecessarily emphasized over the other.

CONCLUSION

The main thing we need to remember is that it is our duty to "*preach the word*" (**2 Tim. 4:2**). As long as we do that, it doesn't matter so much whether it is via topical or textual arrangement.



A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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

Is the Faithful Saint Continually Cleansed?

HIRAM HUTTO

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First of all, it should be pointed out that the question is self-contradictory. How? It speaks about the blood continually cleansing. **1 John 1:7** tells us that his blood cleanseth us from sin. So, if the blood is continually cleansing, it is continually cleansing from sin, which means that there is sin present that needs cleansing. That being true, the person who is being continually cleansed must be continually sinning. Now, how can a person be called a faithful saint (both terms) while at the same time he is continually sinning? Clearly, the question contradicts itself.

Further, to imply that a Christian is one who continually sins is to contradict the Bible. It says that a Christian does not practice sin (**1 John 3:9, NASB; the same tense and idea is in 3:6 and 5:18**). If a person who is continually sinning isn't practicing sin, what on earth would he have to do to practice it? Again, when Paul asks, *“Shall we continue in sin?”*, he answers, *“God forbid”* (**Rom. 6:1**). According to the position we are examining, he should have said, “Not only may we continue in sin, but we will be faithful saints while so doing”! The fact is, this passage and others show that sin is not the norm for the Christian, it is the exception.

What is frequently meant by such questions as heads this article is: Is the faithful saint automatically cleansed of sins of ignorance and/or weakness. **1 John 1:7** is cited to prove that he is. Not only does **1 John 1:7** not teach that doctrine, the passage says ab-

solutely nothing per se about sins of weakness or ignorance. It says the blood of Jesus cleanses us *“from all sin.”* Whatever the passage says about sins of ignorance and weakness, it says the same thing about sins of rebellion and disobedience. It says *“all sin.”* But someone might respond (and the idea is current), the person under consideration in **1 John 1** is said to *“walk in the light”* and a person who is walking in the light will not be guilty of sins of rebellion and disobedience, only sins of weakness and/or ignorance. Who said so? Did God? If so, where? Obviously, a person who is guilty of rebellion and disobedience is not *“in the light”* at the point at which he is guilty of rebellion or disobedience, but no sin is *“in the light.”* After all, *“God is light and in him is no darkness at all”* (**1 John 1:5**), and if sin is not darkness, what is? There is no sin (rebellion, disobedience, or whatever) in the light.

Consider another point. In **Heb. 3:2** God says that Moses was *“faithful in all his house;”* yet at Meribah God said that Moses *“did not believe in me”* (**Num. 20:12**) and that he *“rebelled against my rod”* (**v.24**). Although, in general, Moses was described as faithful, he certainly was not faithful there, neither did God approve nor automatically forgive him. Instead, God was wroth (**Deut. 3:27**) and would not hear Moses, but rebuked him. I cannot conceive of anyone's thinking that he was faithful in the point where God said he did not believe, and that he was re-

bellious. To say otherwise is to say that a person can be full of faith (faithful) in a point where he is lacking in faith. A person might be faithful in a number of areas, and yet be unfaithful at some particular point, and as it was in Moses' case, a very vital point. Surely nobody would claim that Moses died still impenitent and rebellious about the matter but God forgave him anyway. The idea that the only kinds of sins that a faithful Christian (one who walks in the light) commits are sins of ignorance and weakness is not taught in the Bible, nor does it teach that God automatically forgives those (or any other) sins.

To say that a person is automatically cleansed, like the windshield wiper (or that he benefits; i.e., is forgiven, even as he sins), sounds too much like the Baptist preacher who said that he could seduce some woman but God would work it out for his good (benefit). It reminds me of the Baptist who affirmed in a debate with me that a child of God could get drunk, that he could die drunk, and would go to heaven anyway; that a child of God could lie, that he could die with a lie on his tongue (as did Ananias and Sapphira), and he would go to heaven anyway; that a child of God could commit adultery, that he could get killed in the act, and the child of God could commit adultery with a person who was not a child of God, that both of them get killed in the act, and the child of God would go to heaven but the one who was not a child of God would go to Hell. Frankly, it surprised me when he affirmed this publicly and openly, but it shocked me to learn that some brethren evidently believe it and some teach that which logically leads to the same conclusion. **I did not believe it then, and I do not believe it now.**

The Bible clearly teaches that a child of God can sin. John says, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is*

not in us" (1 John 1:8). But it just as clearly teaches that a child of God does not have to sin. In fact, John wrote his first epistle so that his readers would *"sin not"* (2:1). If a Christian cannot keep from sinning, he has to sin, and John wasted his letter. Such a claim impugns the wisdom of God. And Peter says, *"If ye do these things, ye shall never stumble"* (2 Pet. 1:10) that a child of God can not fall (note the important difference between "cannot" [impossible] and "can not" [possible not to]). He doesn't have to fall. If a Christian must sin ("man, because he is man, sins" is as false when taught by "conservative" brethren, as it is when taught by Edward Fudge or John Calvin), why does God hold him responsible for doing something he could not keep from doing anyway? Such does away with man's being a creature of choice. Man sins all right enough, not because he must sin, but because he chooses to sin, and therefore is guilty. The idea that a faithful Christian saint is continually cleansed because he is continually sinning is not in the Bible.

Some have even claimed that when a person unknowingly violates God's law, God automatically forgives him (like the windshield wiper), then later when man learns that he has broken God's law he must repent, etc. Why should he repent? What does he have to repent of? After all, if God forgave him at the time he sinned, the sin isn't on his record; he doesn't need to repent. What he should do, if the argument is correct, is thank God for having already forgiven him without repentance and before he ever learned about it! Still others claim that a person who unwittingly violates God's law is not then guilty (**they need to read Lev. 4:13,22,27**) but when he later learns that he has violated God's law, if he does not then repent, he is guilty. Among the many problems with this argument is, it changes God's definition of

sin. God said, "*Sin is the transgression of the law*" (**1 John 3:4**). This doctrine says, "No, this is wrong. Sin is not the transgression of the law. Sin is the awareness of the transgression of the law." But the Bible doesn't teach that either.

Yes, Christians sin, and God has made provisions for them when they do, but he has made no provisions for them to live in sin. When John states that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, he does what is frequently done in the Scriptures - he is simply stating a truth without giving all the details of the matter. Just as Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them*" (**Luke 23:34**), he did not give any conditions for forgiveness, and it was several days later when Peter told them what those conditions were (**Acts 2:36-38**). So the blood cleanses us from all sin (**v.7**), but it is **verse 9** that mentions one of the conditions man must meet for that forgiveness; it does not mention all of them, for it says nothing about repentance. That is learned, elsewhere. The passage also says that we must confess our sins. It does not say we are to confess that we are sinners, nor does it say that if we confess that we are sinners, God will forgive. That may or may not be true, but **1 John 1:7-9** does not say so. It says that we are to confess our sins to be forgiven. Instead of teaching one to be confident of his salvation and feel secure about it because the blood of Christ will automatically or continually cleanse our sins, we need to teach people as Peter did Simon, "*Repent . . . of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee*" (**Acts 8:22**).

No, the faithful saint is not continually cleansed by the blood of Christ because a faithful saint is not continually sinning. But a saint may be often cleansed by the blood, just as often as he meets the conditions given by God.

"GIVE IT A REST"

Jeff Belknap

The Bible compares error to leaven within a lump of dough, and we are commanded to purge it from us, so it won't spread and grow.

And for those who just aren't bakers, give this illustration a test: Leave some leavened dough alone and give it a little "rest."

Before your very eyes, the lump will swell and rise, until it has doubled and tripled (and more) from its original size.

And what once had been a little heap soon bulges out of control, for in giving leaven a little rest, we encourage it to grow.

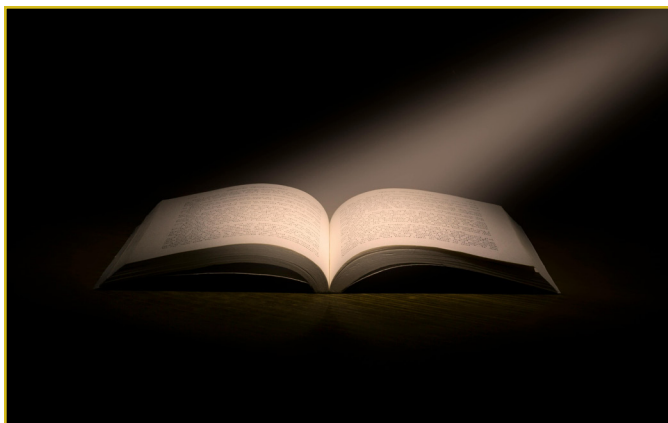
And as we pause to consider this lesson (the way that leaven works), we must draw the spiritual parallel to error within the church.

The leaven of sin, when left alone gets progressively out of hand, until finally, its insidious growth corrupts the entire land.

The "rest" afforded to lumps and sin is an ironic little misnomer, for when we leave these alone to "rest," instead, they tend to grow more.

And so, in exposing error, we must never "give it a rest," even when told that our persistence renders us "obsessed."

Let us trust in God – and not in men who often let us down. We must purge the sin among us to inherit the eternal crown.



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