

The Whole Counsel of God

MAR. 2025 | VOLUME 2 | NUMBER 4

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 MAR. 2025

It is with great joy we present the fourth edition in our second volume of *The Whole Counsel of God*.

As with recent editions of the journal, we have included an article emphasizing some basic principles of Bible authority. In the last edition of the journal (Vol. 2, No. 3), we included an article titled “*Generic and Specific Authority*,” which alluded to the importance of recognizing the silence of the scriptures. With this month’s edition, we have included an article titled, “*Great Commission Only Applied to Apostles*.” Misunderstanding



basic principles of Bible authority, some have argued that since Jesus directly addressed His apostles in giving the Great Commission, that means this commission is not required to be carried out by all Christians today. This article, however, seeks to address the various issues with such a view.

Additionally, various other subjects are addressed in this edition of the journal, such as:

Who/what are the “*spirits in prison*” referenced in **1 Pet. 3:18-20**?

What are the implications of the teaching that Christians have been “*sealed with the Holy Spirit*” (**Eph. 1:13-14**)?

Does gender equality exist within the New Testament’s teachings on marriage, divorce, and remarriage?

Are there differences in what is demanded from a public confession of sin versus a private confession to God?

We pray these articles and all other information included in this publication will be of great spiritual benefit to those who read it – “*These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete*” (**1 John 1:4, NASB**).

As always, we greatly appreciate all the encouragement that each of you provide.

(DTS)

Table of Contents

The Spirits in Prison	4
The Seal of the Holy Spirit	5
Living Blamelessly	8
Is Progressive Repentance Scriptural?	9
Think on This	10
Great Commission Only Applied to Apostles?	11
Myth Busters	13
Gender Equality in Divorce and Remarriage	14
A Biblical “Need-to-Know” Policy	16
Public vs Private Confessions of Sin	17
Dusting One’s Feet	18
Sword Swipes	19

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.

If you know someone who would like to be added to our mailing list, please provide their digital mailing information using the method of contact described above.

If you would like to schedule a free one hour Bible study at your convenience, please submit a request via the **Contact Form** listed above.



The Spirits in Prison

MIKE JOHNSON | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED APR. 2014 IN SEEKING THINGS ABOVE



1 Pet. 3:18-20 is a passage which has prompted many questions. It speaks of Jesus having gone to preach to the spirits in prison: *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water”* (NKJV). What does this passage mean?

One interpretation is that Christ went to the place of torment, between the time of his death and resurrection, and preached to the people who lived in the days of Noah, who had died in disobedience. Some use this viewpoint to teach that a person will get a second chance after death.

The above explanation raises many questions. First, why would Christ go and preach only to those living before the flood? We know God is not a respecter of persons (**Rom. 2:11**). Second, what message could Christ have preached to them? A message of

condemnation would not have had any effect, as these people already stood condemned. Further, it could not have been a message of salvation as the Bible teaches we are going to be judged based on things done in the body, i.e. in this life (**2 Cor. 5:10, Rom. 2:6**). Also, a person cannot pass from the place of torment to paradise once death has occurred (**Luke 16:26**). This interpretation is contrary to general Bible teaching, and, as we shall see, does not fit the context.

The explanation of this passage is simple. The text helps to identify when this preaching took place. It says, *“in the days of Noah.”* Whatever preaching occurred, took place, not during Christ’s entombment, but in the days of Noah. Was Christ literally preaching during the days of Noah? One would think not. Consider the following. **1 Pet. 1:11** tells us that the prophets spoke by the *“Spirit of Christ.”* Christ did preach to the people of Noah’s day before the flood. However, Christ preached through Noah, who was, in fact, a preacher of righteousness (**2 Pet. 2:5**). Noah was an instrument of Christ.

What about **v.19**, which refers to the people preached to as *“spirits in prison?”* It is not saying they were spirits (i.e. separated from the body) when the preaching took place. Instead, that would have been their state at the time of Peter’s writings (**also note 2 Pet. 2:4, 9**). The NASB says, *“He went and made proclamation of the spirits now in prison.”* We need to prepare for the Judgment now. Man will not get a second chance.

The Seal of the Holy Spirit

DYLAN STEWART | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

WWW.THEGOODNEWSOFGOD.ORG



Eph. 1:13-14 reads, *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”* As a whole, **Eph. 1** shows how all three members of the Godhead have played an important role in redeeming mankind. God the Father planned and executed the scheme of redemption for mankind (**v.3-6**); Jesus, the Son of God, provided the blood sacrifice for redemption (**v.7-12**); and the Spirit of God seals those who are saved (**v.13-14**). So, as **Eph. 1:13-14** clearly shows, Christians are “sealed” with the Holy Spirit (see also **2 Cor. 1:22**). What exactly does this mean?

In Scripture, a seal indicates authentication (**Esth. 3:10, 12; 8:2, 8; Dan. 6:17**), ownership (**Jer. 32:11-12**), security (**2 Tim. 2:19**), and confirmation (**John 3:33**). Each of these definitions apply in certain respects to what is taught in **Eph. 1:13-14**, but, more concisely, the seal of the Holy Spirit serves as a guarantee (or first installment) of salvation for the saints. God has given Christians His Spirit as a guarantee (**2 Cor. 5:5**; in the

NKJV Footnotes, the translators identify this guarantee as a “down payment” or “earnest”). As such, we must not “*grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*” (**Eph. 4:30**). The seal of the Holy Spirit occurs in the present and indicates what will happen in the future (“*redemption of the purchased possession*” is spoken of in the future-tense in **Eph. 1:13-14**) IF we remain sealed. Thus, it is possible for a Christian to allow sin to break God’s seal of redemption.



The Scriptures teach that when a Christian sins the Holy Spirit (God’s “*seal*” of approval) is forced to depart from us. John wrote, “*Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us*” (**1 John 3:24**). This verse shows how the Holy Spirit continues to dwell in us as long as we are keeping God’s commandments, which implies that if we stop obeying God, the Spirit will not remain in us. David evidently understood this concept extremely well considering his plea in **Psalms 51:11** after he committed numerous sins stemming from the adulterous affair with Bathsheba. David begged God, “*Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*” So, we

should never conclude that a person sealed by the Spirit cannot be lost (once saved always saved) because that certainly is proven false in Scripture (see also **Eph. 5:3-5; Gal. 5:4**).

The Holy Spirit is described in **Eph. 1:13-14** as the “*Spirit of promise*.” The Spirit was announced by promise (**Acts 2:16; Joel 2:28; Zech. 12:10**). Although a miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit is not promised to all who obey the gospel (this was limited to the first century [**1 Cor. 13:8-10**]), all who obey Christ still receive a non-miraculous measure of God’s Spirit when they repent and are baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Peter explains, “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call*” (**Acts 2:38-39**). The “*gift of the Holy Spirit*” is given to all Christians upon obedience to the gospel, and the gift is the Spirit Himself. Due to a fear of “sounding Pentecostal,” many Christians reject the idea that the Holy Spirit dwells physically in their bodies. However, **Eph. 2:19-22** is one of many passages proving the physical indwelling of the Holy Spirit position to be accurate.

Eph. 2:19-22 reads, “*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*” In these verses, Paul uses the figure of a “*temple*” to describe both the church and individual Christians. **Eph. 2:21** references collective believers (the church) as the holy

temple. Then, **v.22** follows up by showing how not only does God dwell in the temple (the church), but He also dwells in Christians individually (“*in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*”). Paul makes this same comparison in **1 Cor. 3** when referring to the church as “*God’s building*” (**v.9**), but then says individual Christians are “*the temple of God*” where His Spirit dwells (**v.16-17**).

God - through the Holy Spirit - dwells in the temples (physical bodies) of all believers. Please note the following passages that prove the Holy Spirit exists as a personal indwelling for believers and does not merely dwell in our hearts via God’s word, as many gospel preachers claim:

- “*And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him*” (**Acts 5:32**).
- “*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (**1 Cor. 6:19-20**).
- “*And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’*” (**2 Cor. 6:16**).
- “*You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,*

He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you . . . The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:9-11, 16).

God no longer dwells in a physical house made with hands but in the hearts of His people (**Acts 17:24; John 4:19-21, 14:23; Eph. 3:17**), as has always been His desire (**Isa. 66:1-2, 57:15**). This is not, however, just some figurative expression because all of the aforementioned passages harmoniously prove beyond any shadow of doubt that God dwells in Christians literally (physically) as long as they abide in Him (**1 John 3:24**).

For every Christian across every century, the Holy Spirit dwells in them personally and provides many assurances. Specifically pertaining to **Eph. 1:13-14**, the Spirit dwells in Christians to serve as a promise, deposit, down payment, or pledge from God until we receive heaven. In other words, the Holy Spirit is given as assurance for the full payment to come later. When you think about it, this is the very core upon which Christianity is built - “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (**Heb. 11:1, NASB**).

Ultimately, being sealed with the Spirit should lead us to living by the Spirit rather than living by the flesh. Paul repeatedly made this point throughout his epistles. In **Gal. 5:16-17, 25**, he urged, “*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another; so that you do not do the things that you wish . . . If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*” Paul would also add in **Gal.**

6:8, “*For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*” Lastly, in **Rom. 8:1-5**, Paul wrote, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*” Christians are expected walk in the Spirit because we are a possession of God; we are not our own (**1 Cor. 3:23**). In fact, Christ died to redeem us and purchase us as His own possession (**Tit. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:9**). When Christians commit certain sins they actually sin directly against the Holy Spirit who dwells personally in our bodies. Paul warned, “*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (**1 Cor. 6:18-20**). So, **1 Cor. 6:19** plainly says, “*the Holy Spirit . . . is in you.*” It is rather sad, then, that so many Christians do not really believe the Holy Spirit is actually “in” them serving as their seal/guarantee of salvation! How much clearer could the Scriptures be?

Living Blamelessly

MICHAEL MCLEMORE | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED NOV. 2024 IN WEATHERLY WEEKLY (2024, P. 186)

Living blamelessly is a central theme in the New Testament, reflecting the believer's pursuit of a life that honors God, displays integrity, and shines as a light to the world. To live blamelessly is not to claim perfection, but to walk in faithful obedience, striving for holiness as a testimony of God's transforming grace. The call to live blamelessly is everywhere made clear throughout Scripture. Listen as Paul urges the Philippians to be "*blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*" (Phil. 2:15). He emphasizes that living blamelessly is not just a private pursuit but it is our very public testimony. Our lives as Christians should stand out in stark contrast to the corruption and moral decay of the world. Similarly, Paul prayed, "*May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thess. 5:23). Blameless living is both a present goal and a future hope as believers prepare for Christ's return. We are called to live blamelessly.

The New Testament provides practical steps for pursuing a blameless life. First, it requires aligning one's life with God's Word. The Psalmist's ethic has become the New Testament Christian's own ethic: "*Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!*" (Psalm 119:1). Obedience to God's commands shapes a blameless character. Second, living blamelessly demands integrity in personal relationships: "*Give no offense to Jews or*

to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:32-33). Living blamelessly sacrifices for others. A blameless life avoids causing unnecessary offense and seeks to reflect God's love and humility. Finally, blameless living requires a reliance on God's grace. Paul reminds us that God chose us "*that we should be holy and blameless before him.*" Our own calling is rooted in God's work, not in our strength alone (Eph. 1:4).

The New Testament also highlights the importance of blameless living for our leaders. Paul writes that an overseer "*must be above reproach*" (Tit. 1:7), and instructs Timothy to appoint elders who are "*above reproach*" (1 Tim. 3:2). Those men who lead are called to model this standard, setting an example for others to follow. They mark the path of blamelessness in Christ and bid us to follow them.

Ultimately, living blamelessly glorifies God: "*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). A blameless life is not self-focused but points others to Christ. Living blamelessly requires continual growth in faith, love, and obedience, empowered by the Spirit and guided by the Word. By living this way, we fulfill our high calling, reflect Christ's character, and are preparing for the day when we are presented blameless "*without spot or wrinkle or any such thing*" before Him.

Is Progressive Repentance Scriptural?

OSAMAGBE LESLEY EGHAREVBA | LAGOS, NIGERIA

PUBLISHED OCT. 2024 IN UNMASKING SOPHISTRY (VOL. 4, NO. 4)

During my preaching work in Ghana in July and August 2024, I heard the term “Progressive Repentance” for the first time. This is the idea that an alien sinner may not repent of his sins by ending the sins before he gets baptized. In particular, if you preach to a polygamist or someone cohabiting, and such believes the gospel and is willing to be baptized, some teach that you may go ahead and baptize him while he keeps living with all of his wives pending when he can completely separate from them. Some others argue that while repentance is necessary before baptism, repentance does not require one to end the sins. They see repentance as a commitment to end sins and not necessarily putting an end to the sin itself. And so, they argue that as long as one has made the promise or the commitment to change, then such may be baptized even if such is still in the sin. However, the Bible teaches that repentance is necessary before baptism (**Acts 2:38**) and clearly, there is no true repentance when your action contradicts what God has commanded. One must bear fruits worthy of repentance to be pleasing to God (**Matt. 3:8**).

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of action (**Matt. 21:29, KJV**). Godly sorrow is NOT repentance (**2 Cor. 7:9-10**). Repentance means to reverse, to change your mind so you think and act differently. In **Matt. 21:28-30**, we read, “*But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said*

likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go.” Who truly repented? The one that said or the one that went? Jesus said the son who said he would not go was the one who repented and went. It shows that the one who did what was necessary was the one who truly repented. The other son who said he would go is a clear indication that he did not repent since he did not do what he needed to do. So, if a man has not done what he ought to do, he has not displayed true repentance.

It is not true repentance if someone does not show the fruits of repentance or does things that are contrary to the change he should be having. A drunkard who said “I repent” but reduced his consumption from one carton of beer to half a carton has not repented. The man who stole your phone and said “I repent” but wishes to keep the phone for 6 months before he returns it has not repented. The polygamous or cohabiting man who says “I repent” but is still living with a woman who is not his wife has not repented.

Some say that we are delaying the salvation of a polygamist if we ask them to end the sin of adultery they are committing before they get baptized. But would baptism wash away sins that one has not repented of? When Jesus noticed that the rich young ruler had a problem with possession, He told him to go and do something first before coming to follow Him. **Matt. 19:21** reads, “*Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’*” Jesus required that something be done FIRST before the ruler would come to Him. Was Jesus delaying his salvation when

He asked him to go and do something first before coming to follow Him? (Please read v.16 to see that the rich young ruler was asking Jesus what to do to have eternal life). Would saying “I would sell them and give to the poor” suffice for actually selling them and giving to the poor?

Many people I know that advocate the baptism first and repentance later doctrine would not restore a brother who was disfellowshipped for cohabiting if he is still living with the girl but says “I repent.” They would not restore a man who was disfellowshipped for marrying a second wife if he’s still living with the woman but says “I repent.” But why would a polygamist be baptized if he says “I repent” but still living with the woman?

If repentance does not mean quitting sin as some said, then it means one may not quit sins before baptism, and so, one may still continue sinning at the point of baptism and some time afterward. If repentance is the decision or commitment to quit sin, then one can decide to quit a sin before baptism and then actually quit the sin some 6 months afterward. So, one can continue sinning some 6 months after baptism. Apparently, let’s just baptize as many people as possible and then we can teach them to change later. That is exactly what some are teaching and that’s unscriptural.

What is the point of baptizing polygamists who are still in that sin in the first place? If after baptism, they perpetually keep living with the multiple wives, what will one do? Leave them alone? Or disfellowship them? What image are we trying to bring to the church when people see us baptizing polygamists and those cohabiting without them ending the sins? Brethren, let

us be careful to follow only what God has said so that we can be pleasing to Him.

THINK ON THIS

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

We live in a world in which the idea is promoted that we should try to gain the most profit possible with the least amount of effort possible. Unfortunately, this thinking has spilled over into the religious realm. Even some churches tell us that eternal life is something that is gained by minimal effort. Some people aren’t even aware of what Jesus spoke on this topic. He said, *“Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it”* (Matt. 7:14). Some Christians do not excel in their spiritual lives because they just aren’t impressed with the fact that diligence is expected. Heb. 11:6 tells us that God only rewards those who *“diligently”* seek Him! We must realize that greatness is expected of us – not greatness in the worldly sense of notoriety, fame, and wealth, but greatness in the heavenly sense – to fully devote ourselves to God 24/7, to serve others, to do good, to tell others the good news of Jesus. Our Lord gives us the strength to do anything He expects of us, and we must choose to use that strength to be of use in His kingdom. He expects greatness. Will you rise to the challenge?

(Jody Lusk | Alabama, United States, Jan. 2025)

Great Commission Only Applied to Apostles?

PAT DONAHUE | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED AUG. 2022 IN DOCTRINE MATTERS



More and more frequently I am hearing preachers say the commission Jesus gave in **Matt. 28:19-20** and **Mark 16:15-16** to teach the gospel to the world was only for the apostles, and not for all Christians. Nothing could be further from the truth. We can see that fact right in **Matt. 28:19-20** itself. It is true this commission was initially addressed to the apostles, but inherent in the commission is that this assignment is to be passed on to all who are baptized. And that gets us Christians today, doesn't it?

Jesus told the apostles in **v.19** to go teach all nations, and then baptize those that accept their teaching. In **v.20**, Jesus explicitly instructs that the ones converted are to be taught "*to observe all things whatsoever*" He had commanded the apostles. Naturally, that would refer to (among other things) the commandment Jesus had just given to the apostles, that is, to teach all nations. So, Jesus is directing every convert to play a role in teaching all nations, not just the apostles. That should conclusively settle this question.

Just because we are not responsible to do everything the apostles did, that wouldn't prove any particular requirement is not bind-

ing on us, would it? If so, that would mean none of the commands to the apostles apply to us – which flatly contradicts **Matt. 28:20**. Shouldn't the correct understanding of **v.20** be that everything the apostles were commanded to do, so are we commanded, except those things which can be proven to be specific to the apostles' work (and not a Christian's work in general)? If yes, then an admission that other Christians should preach would also close the loop on this argument, right? How about **Acts 8:1,4** for that proof? **1 Pet. 2:21** teaches we should follow Jesus' example. There are some things we can't follow Jesus' example on (like raising the dead), but would we conclude from that we don't have to follow the example of Jesus found right in the immediate context (being willing to suffer for God)? If not, why would one reason that exact same way regarding **Matt. 28:20**? Besides teaching, Jesus was commissioning baptism here. And more than just the apostles (then and now) baptize, therefore it becomes obvious the great commission applies to more than just the apostles (then and now).

The expression at the end of **v.20** that says, "*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,*" is Jesus' assurance that He would be with those carrying out this great commission until the end of the world. But that doesn't make any sense if Jesus is only talking about the apostles in their lifetimes. They are long since dead and gone, but this passage comforts us to know Jesus is with us even today as we do our best to fulfill His commission to preach the gospel to the

lost. Again, all of this is made clear by **Matt. 28:19-20**.

Some object saying to this conclusion by saying it is impossible for every Christian to go to every nook and cranny of every nation. First, we should never appeal to the consequences of a Biblical statement to accept or reject said statement. If each and every Christian is required to go to every nation, then we all better get busy doing that. But that is not what **Matt. 28:19-20** was saying, not even then to the apostles. It wasn't even the responsibility of each and every apostle to go to every nation; instead, Jesus gave that responsibility to the apostles as a whole. Actually, He gave that responsibility to the apostles and all other Christians at that time as a whole. Most likely the eunuch of **Acts 8:28** was the first Christian to take the gospel Ethiopia, and he wasn't an apostle. Within a few years of when the church first started, there were probably tens of thousands of disciples. The great commission was for all those thousands of disciples (perhaps led by the apostles) to each do his or her part in getting the gospel to every nook and cranny of the world. We can read that was accomplished by all the Christians as a whole (not just the twelve) by the time **Col. 1:23** was written. And we see this fact in how the great commission was carried out in the first century. It wasn't just the apostles who felt the need to evangelize; it was each and every Christian:

- **1 Pet. 3:15** – Christians (not just apostles) are to “give an answer to every man.”
- **Jude 1-3** – All that are “sanctified” are to “earnestly contend for the faith.”
- **Heb. 5:12** – “when for the time ye [not just the apostles] ought to be teachers.”



Think about what a kickstart the great commission got when the twelve apostles preached the gospel for the first time (**Luke 24:47**) to “men, out of every nation under heaven” (**Acts 2:4-11**), and then that audience went back to their homes all over the world and fulfilled their mission of carrying out **Mark 16:15**. Those who deny the great commission applies today must deny this is an amazing fulfillment of such.

When the apostle Paul was sent out on one of his missionary journeys in **Acts 13:2**, Barnabas went with him. It would be strange to say Paul was carrying out the great commission but Barnabas wasn't, considering they were doing the exact same work, and doing it together. That would about like saying only the man of **Luke 16:18b** was committing adultery, but not the woman with whom he was committing adultery!

Weren't the Thessalonian brethren carrying out the same work Paul and Barnabas were doing? You would certainly get that impression from **1 Thess. 1:8**: “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad.” Certainly, they were fulfilling the great commission of **Mark 16:15-16**.

And what about Philip's example in **Acts 8:5, 12-13; 8:35-38** and Timothy's example in **2 Tim. 4:2**? Weren't they teaching

and baptizing – just as the great commission directs?

Passages like **Phil. 4:9** command us to emulate the apostles, and since the apostles were told to go out and try to convert the world – we must do likewise. We certainly understand how **Phil. 4:9** requires us to follow **Acts 20:7** and the first day of the week Lord's Supper; why don't we apply the same logic to the apostles' follow through of **Matt. 28:19**? Consistency demands that these two apostolic examples stand or fall together.

Acts 8:1,4 (all the church "*went every where preaching the word*") is also a binding example for all. It proves all Christians (not just the apostles) did what the apostles were commanded to do – preach the gospel everywhere. Are we following that example?

If how the great commission was carried out in the book of Acts helps us understand what the purpose for great commission baptism was, why wouldn't how the great commission was carried out in the book of Acts also help us to understand who was supposed to carry out the great commission? It is the exact same logic, right?

CONCLUSION

Not only did the Great Commission apply to all Christians in the first century; it applies to each and every Christian today. God's church as a whole should attempt to carry the gospel to every nation in every generation. That means each and every Christian has a job to do. For some, that means traveling to far-away lands to get the truth out. To others that means trying to convert any person they can make an opportunity with to teach in their area. Let's get to work and carry out the Great Commission in all of our lives – all Christians, man, woman, and youth.

MYTH BUSTERS

"They will turn away their ears from the truth & will turn aside to myths"

(2 Tim. 4:4, NASB)

A Christian recently told me that he did not believe it is very wise to approach a Bible verse with the mentality of showing what the verse **DOES NOT** say. As this brother contended, we instead should always approach a verse primarily to show what the text **DOES** say. The fact of the matter is that we should actually take **BOTH** approaches to every verse because doing so is an essential part of rightly dividing the scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15).

It is important to establish what a verse **DOES NOT** say based on our knowledge of other verses so we can accurately determine whatever verse we are examining **DOES** say. Consider an example: Once we establish that John 3:16 **DOES NOT** teach that faith alone will save, we then can easily understand how passages like Acts 2:38 and Luke 13:3 show how other conditions such as baptism and repentance are just as essential for salvation. We must take all of the passages discussing a particular subject and look at them together before forming a conclusion (Psalm 119:160). God has placed the impetus on mankind to love Him enough (2 Thess. 2:10) to diligently search through the scriptures so we can piece everything together as He intended.

(DTS)

Gender Equality in Divorce and Remarriage

BRYAN DOCKENS | NEW MEXICO, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED JUL. 2024 IN WHOLE COUNSEL (VOL. 2, No. 28)



Jesus preached a very straightforward rule disapproving of divorce and also of subsequent marriage thereafter, saying, “*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery*” (Luke 16:18). In another text, the Lord made clear there is but one exemption to this rule and that is divorce for fornication: “*Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery*” (Matt. 19:9). As it has been said, “The exception proves the rule.” If Jesus forbade all divorce and all marriage subsequent to divorce, and then offered up only fornication as the reason to divorce and afterward enjoy the freedom to marry again, then divorce for addiction, abuse, abandonment, or any other failure is unacceptable to Him. Admittedly, this is strict, but “*there is one Lawgiver*” (James 4:12), so obedience is necessary. As if Christ’s rule governing divorce and remarriage is not already stringent enough, there are some who would bind it even further, suggesting that, as worded, the exemption only applies to the man, and not to the woman. This is an un-

warranted conclusion based on superficial study and it must be rejected.

Concerning divorce and remarriage, what Jesus said about the man, He said about the woman. Notice Mark’s account: “*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery*” (Mark 10:11-12). Disciples are obligated to take in the totality of what Jesus taught on a subject, not just snippets.

For comparison, consider the title inscribed over Jesus as He hanged from the cross. According to Mark, Pontius Pilate wrote, “*THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (Mark 15:26). Luke put it down as, “*THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (Luke 23:38). Matthew recorded it as, “*THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (Matt. 27:37). And John attributed Pilate’s accusation as, “*JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (John 19:19). None of these four accounts are incorrect, but, without each other, they are incomplete. One must read them all and conclude that the placard read, “*THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS*.” Such is the case for Jesus’s instruction regarding divorce and remarriage. Between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, none are incorrect, but each is incomplete without the others. Luke’s account is the most basic: “*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery*” (Luke 16:18). Mark’s version contains the same information, but also pres-

ents equality between genders: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). Matthew’s record echoes Luke again, but instead of gender equality, his distinction is to offer up the exception: “Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matt. 19:9). Therefore, it is fair to conclude that Jesus’ law on divorce is thus: **Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery against her; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery. And if a woman divorces her husband, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, she commits adultery against him; and whoever marries him who is divorced from his wife commits adultery.**

If it is true that remarriage rights are gender specific, then an awkward conclusion will be forced concerning widowers. All three New Testament passages addressing marriage rights following the death of a spouse mention the wife being free to marry after her husband dies, and never the other way around. Paul explained to the brethren in Rome, “The woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man” (Rom. 7:2-3). He said to the saints in Corinth, “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives;

but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). And he told Timothy, “I desire that the younger widows marry” (1 Tim. 5:14). Unless those who contend that only a man may divorce his fornicating wife and be free to marry are also willing to claim only a widow may marry after burying a husband, then the assertion fails. That which proves too much, proves nothing at all.

When the apostle stated, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), this is what he meant. Unless details in context prove a distinction between the sexes, such as the duties of husbands to wives and wives to husbands (Eph. 5:22-31), then what Christ and the apostles said about men, they said about women, too. Otherwise, it is inaccurate to say, “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34).

Because God is indeed impartial, what Jesus said about men being saved is equally true of women. The Lord proclaimed, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16), but no one regards that “he” as gender-specific. Thankfully, “both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12).

If the Holy Spirit has something to say to one sex but not the other, that will be clear enough (1 Cor. 11:3-15, 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15). In the absence of such specificity, it is only right to conclude that “he” or “man” are meant to convey the general sense of “person” or “mankind.” That is how language functions.

A Biblical “Need-to-Know” Policy

GREG GWIN | TENNESSEE, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED MAR. 2023 IN THE COLLEGEVUE CHURCH OF CHRIST BULLETIN

The term “need-to-know,” when used by government and other organizations, describes the restriction of information which is considered very sensitive. Under “need-to-know” restrictions, even if one has all the necessary official approvals to access certain details (such as a security clearance, etc.), he still would not be given access to such information unless there was a specific “need-to-know;” that is, access to the information would be necessary for the person to conduct of his official duties. Sometimes our work in a local church must also honor a sort of “need-to-know” policy.

For example, a certain member might become aware of a sinful situation involving another member of the congregation. Action must be taken, but there is no justification for spreading this news to others. They have no “need-to-know,” at least not yet, and to include them would compound the problem rather than solving it.

Notice how Jesus taught a gradually widening circle of those who would ‘need-to-know’ such a thing: “*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 an heathen man and a publican*” (Matt. 18:15-17). As this procedure is implemented, one of two things will happen:

(1) the erring brother or sister will repent, and the problem will be solved; or, (2) the matter may need involvement by others and ultimately be presented to the whole church (as Jesus prescribed). In either case individual Christians should understand and respect this scriptural ‘need-to-know’ policy.

Unfortunately, some Christians feel “left out” or think others are withholding “news” that they have a right to know. Some may begin to gossip or backbite via an unofficial ‘grapevine’ that spreads throughout the congregation. This, of course, is sinful and counter-productive. If they are never brought into the case they should see this as something to rejoice in because the problem has been solved. It is certainly not a thing to resent.

Often those with the first exposure to such sensitive subjects will be the elders of the church. They have a heavy burden of responsibility in regards to each individual member in the congregation (Heb. 13:17) and therefore will need to act promptly and correctly in dealing with the news they have learned. During such occasions, others in the church need to respect the elders and honor their unique role as overseers (Acts 20:28). It is their specific business “to know.” Others have no “need-to-know” and should not do anything to interfere – at least not until it has reached the point where their involvement would be helpful and authorized by God’s divinely designed “need-to-know” policy.

Public vs Private Confessions of Sin

DYLAN STEWART | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

WWW.THEGOODNEWSOFGOD.ORG

I recently spoke to a Christian visiting our assemblies who supports the doctrine of continual cleansing (Christians supposedly receive automatic forgiveness without repentance and confession of sin). By mere coincidence, that same morning I taught our Bible class and spent much of our time refuting that particular doctrine. After services concluded, the visitor kindly and lovingly approached me to discuss why he disagreed (**Prov. 25:9a**). He explained that he believes Christians do not need to specifically confess every sin to God. Instead, he believes that if a Christian regularly makes general confessions like the tax collector in **Luke 18:13** (“*God, be merciful to me for I am a sinner!*”), such would suffice as an adequate confession to God to receive forgiveness of unrepented sins and sins of ignorance. The New Testament proves, however, that while generalities can suffice during **public** confessions of sin, God demands more than just general acknowledgements of sin during our **private** confessions to Him.

James 5:16a teaches the necessity of publicly confessing sin. James wrote, “*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed*” The Bible nowhere teaches that we must publicly confess every sin, but there are occasions when publicly confessing sin is necessary. **1 John 1:9** also teaches the need to confess sin, but speaks strictly about private confessions between a Christian and God. Whereas the word translated “*confess*” in **James 5:16** simply means “to acknowledge” (Strong), a different Greek word for “*confess*” is used

in **1 John 1:9** to indicate a person is willing to “admit or declare oneself guilty of what one is accused of” (Thayer). The word also means, “to declare openly” (Thayer). Based on the definition of the word in **1 John 1:9**, it seems pretty clear that private confession requires more than a mere acknowledgment that one is a sinner, such as in **Luke 18:13**. Instead, a clear admission or “open” declaration of what one committed must be acknowledged to be forgiven. Yet, when it comes to public confessions of sins, this same type of openness is not always required because discretion should be used during public confessions so as not to potentially negatively affect the faith of others (**Matt. 18:6-7**) or darken the minds of people trying to walk in the light.

The specific details of certain sins are, in some senses, shameful to speak of publicly. **Eph. 5:12** explains, “*For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.*” This text principally shows how wisdom and discretion must be used to determine what is appropriate to openly discuss or, conversely, leave unmentioned when publicly discussing certain sins. Consequently, this principle can affect how public confessions of sin are made. That said, the need for discretion during a public confession does not negate the fact that **specific** (and not generic) confessions of sin must be made to God privately whenever a Christian sins (**1 John 1:9**). Such is always necessary for a Christian to apply the blood of Christ after he transgresses God’s law (**1 John 1:7**)!

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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

Dusting One's Feet

IRVEN LEE

PUBLISHED OCT. 1983 IN GUARDIAN OF TRUTH (VOL. XXVII: 20, P. 616-617)

“Daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). This is an example of zealous Christians carrying out the Lord’s command to preach the gospel to every creature in Jerusalem. This same work was carried out in the Gentile world. Paul disputed *“daily in the school of Tyrannus. This continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:9-10).* There is evidently a lack of this kind of zeal in America today.

The Master mentioned the sower as he went forth to sow. In this parable, the seed is the word of God. This parable is found in **Matt. 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8.** It is heaven’s desire that we know of this work and that we go forth with zeal sowing the seed. We have no way of knowing who will hear and believe.

Jesus found that those who sat in Moses’ seat were not good listeners. The *“publicans and the harlots”* were much better listeners than the *“chief priests and the elders of the people”* (**Matt. 21:23, 32**). Both John and the Savior could observe this. Some had ears that were dull of hearing, eyes that were closed, and hearts that were hardened (**Matt. 13:13-16**). Even the greatest Teacher of all times did not reach these people. *“Never man spake like this man,”* but the self-righteous Pharisees were not benefitted (**John 7:46**). It was not the Teacher’s fault. He taught and confirmed His message with signs. He went about doing

good, but the god of this world has blinded their eyes (**2 Cor. 4:4; Acts 10:38**).

There are many passages that make it evident that it is not always the fault of the teacher when the word is rejected by some of the people. They cannot see if they are not looking, and they cannot hear if they are not listening. This fact and these passages are not meant to cause the servants of Christ to give up preaching, but these servants do have a right to realize that they are not required to do the impossible.

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:4-6). This, of course, is not talking about a brother who errs and needs to be corrected (**Gal. 6: 1; James 5:19-20**). It is speaking of those who refuse help. They sin willfully after knowing the truth (**please read Heb. 10:24-31**). Some cannot be reached. God is willing, but they are not. The impossibility is in getting them to repent.

There were some spiritually blind people concerning whom our Lord said, *“Let them alone”* (**Matt. 15:1-14**). Our Lord tasted of death for every one, but not every one will do the will of the Father (**Heb. 2:9; Matt. 7:21-**

27). He even wept over Jerusalem whom He had taught because they had rejected their only hope of life. Their house was left to them desolate (**Luke 19:41; Matt. 23:37, 39**). This sorrow of heart was at the close of His diligent work among them. Some who say, “I will,” do not; but we can be thankful that some who say, “I will not,” do repent so we should preach the gospel to every creature.

We are not required to continue on and on and on working with people who will not obey. “*Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the gentiles*” (**Acts 13:46**). Should we be that bold after we have tried hard and miserably failed?

When the sower went forth to sow, some seed fell by the wayside, but there was no harvest there. These hearts were so hard that none could teach them. Some seed fell on shallow soil and for a time there seemed to be hope, but the plants withered. Converts of this type have been found in all in all generations on the earth. Some seed fell among thorns and brought forth nothing. These people were too busy with trivial things and with this life to read the Bible, worship, or teach their children. Their children may turn out to be wayside soil (**Luke 8**). Some seed fell on good soil and produced a good harvest. These were people with honest and good hearts. This type makes the efforts worthwhile. The people with good hearts may be compared with gold, silver, and precious stones (**1 Cor. 3:12-13**). This precious material is in contrast to wood, hay, and stubble. The latter cannot stand the test of fire, and the test is sure to come to all.

When the twelve were sent out on the limited commission, they were told, “*Who-soever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet*” (**Matt. 10: 14**). There is no necessity to cast “*your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you*” (**Matt. 7:6**).

Let the worthy teacher go among those who can be taught. Let none be too hasty to give up when there is still room for hope. Evidently there is still a time to dust one’s feet and turn away from those who are unwilling to be taught. Even in a corrupt city like Corinth the Lord had many who could learn. They needed to be taught (**read Acts 18:9-11**).

There are some in the area where I live who seemingly will go to the judgment as people who have not done the will of the Father. Are there some near you who also have interests other than the righteousness and kingdom, of God? The Christ has been appointed to handle the matter of judgment for the obedient and the disobedient for the believers and the unbelievers (**Acts 17:31**).

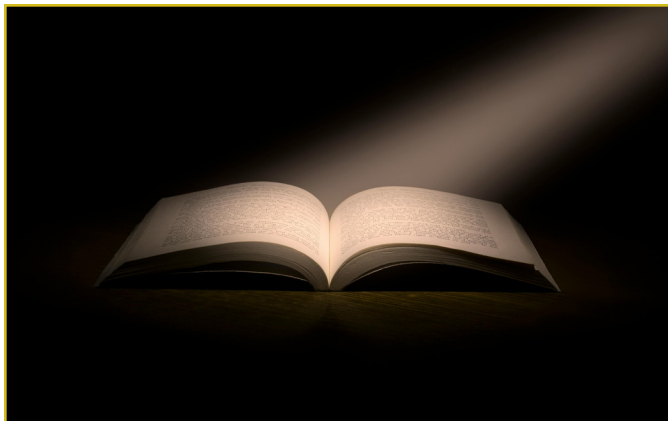
SWORD SWIPES

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

**If you are happy with your position
in life, then make sure to tell God
“thank you” in song.**

**“Is anyone among you suffering?
Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful?
Let him sing psalms” (James 5:13).**

(DTS)



www.thegoodnewsofgod.org