

The Whole Counsel of God

NOV. 2025 | VOLUME 3 | NUMBER 2

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

Acts 20:26-27 NKJV

From the Editor's Desk

DYLAN STEWART - 01 NOV 2025

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

In this edition of the journal, we have included articles addressing Godly homes, answering if the Songs of Solomon are an allegory for Christ or something else, examining what the New Testament teaches regarding slavery, answering questions regarding the authority of local churches having a common treasury, as well as several other articles that I pray will be of great spiritual benefit to the readers.



I 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, roughly, the past three and a half years. If you are not subscribed to the Bible Blog, contact me via the method described in the *Table of Contents* to sign up for email notifications alerting you every time a new article is posted.

Lastly, the [Tract, Debates, and Commentaries](#) page of the website has been updated. I recently completed a verse-by-verse commentary on Ephesians, which I have posted to the same page where you can find my other book, "*What About the Mental Divorce?*" I worked on the Ephesian commentary on-and-off for the past 18 months, and I am glad that I spent so much time studying this wonderful epistle. My understanding of and appreciation for the epistle has grown greatly as result of my extensive studies. I pray you will find the commentary to be useful. Lord willing, I hope to complete and post my other current projects (commentaries on Colossians and Philemon) to the website soon. In the mean time, you can find PDF charts of these commentaries [here](#).

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

(DTS)

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

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A Godly Home

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Col. 3:18-21, along with its parallel passage in **Eph. 5:22-6:4**, teaches us what a God-fearing home looks like. For the purposes of this article, we will primarily examine **Col. 3:18-21** to determine what God expects from wives, husbands, children, and parents (namely, fathers). All who believe in the God of heaven should not listen to what the world teaches on how to develop a good home; instead, they should listen to the words of God Himself because, after all, *“unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain”* (**Psalms 127:1**). Let us consider what the Lord says about building good homes that please and honor Him.

WIVES

Col. 3:18 says, *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”* Given societal changes over the last hundred years, many take great issue with this text. The point of controversy is found in Paul’s demand for a wife to *“submit”* to her husband. Many claim that such a demand for submission is both oppressive and misogynistic. However, when a person – male or female – submits to Christ, that person begins a life of

submission. Furthermore, women are not the only class of people commanded to submit to another class. All people – whether male or female – are commanded to submit to various rulers, heads, and authorities. Consider several examples:

- Husbands and wives must submit to each other by yielding their bodies to each other (**1 Cor. 7:4**).
- Children must submit to their parents (**Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1**).
- Bondservants must submit to their masters (**Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:5-9**).
- All are required to submit to their governmental leaders (**1 Pet. 2:13-14; Rom. 13:1, 7**).
- The church, universally speaking, must submit to Christ (**Eph. 5:23-24**).
- Christians in a local church must submit to their overseers (**1 Pet. 5:1-5; Heb. 13:7, 17**).
- Christians must submit to fellow Christians (**1 Pet. 5:1-5; Eph. 5:17-21; Phil. 2:3**).
- Although the majority do not, all of mankind must submit to God and Christ (**James 4:7-10**).

As we see, the *“new man”* in Christ (**Col. 3:10**) lives a life of submission! When a wife submits to her husband as **Col. 3:18** requires, she displays a defining quality of her *“new man”* in Christ.

A wife is required to submit to her husband. She is not called to submit to her husband because God views women as infe-

rior in any way. Men and women are undeniably on equal spiritual footing (**Gal. 3:28**). However, despite clear spiritual equality, God still requires women to submit to men (**1 Cor. 11:3**; **1 Tim. 2:12**); He specifically requires wives lovingly submit to their husbands (**Titus 2:4-5**). God has designed a special order where man is the leader and spiritual head of woman due to Adam being formed first, then Eve (**1 Tim. 2:13**; **1 Cor. 11:8-9**), as well as Eve, not Adam, being the one first deceived by Satan (**1 Tim. 2:14**). If a wife respects the Lord, she will submit to her husband knowing his position of authority has been given by God.

Wives must submit to (follow, honor, and respect) their husbands “*as is fitting in the Lord*.” In other words, a wife must submit to her husband in the same manner as she submits to Christ (**Eph. 5:23-24**). The exception to this rule is when a husband demands something of his wife that is contrary to the will of God. In such cases, a wife must do the Lord’s will rather than her husband’s will (**Acts 5:29**). If a Christian woman is married to an unbeliever or an unfaithful Christian, she still must submit to her unrighteous husband, but she must not submit to his decisions in such a way that causes her to sin or partake in his sins (**1 Tim. 5:22**). A woman in such difficult circumstances must gracefully and gently submit to a man who likely has no concern for her spiritual welfare. Yet, her gentle and quiet submission can potentially have a soul-saving impact on her spouse (**1 Pet. 3:1-6**).

HUSBANDS

Col. 3:19 reads, “*Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them*.” After addressing the fact that wives must submit to their husbands, Paul then commanded husbands to “*love*” their wives and “*not be*

bitter toward them.” Christ’s selfless, sanctifying, and sacrificial affection for the church is the divine example that husbands must follow in loving their wives (**Eph. 5:25-29, 33**).

A husband’s love should be sacrificial in the sense of being willing to die for his spouse, but also in the sense of placing his wife’s happiness, well-being, and interests ahead of his own (**1 Cor. 13:5**). Husbands should plentifully supply the needs, support, consideration, happiness, love, and spiritual welfare of their wife (**Songs of Sol. 7:10**). Wives are owed such love (**Eph. 5:28**). A husband is guilty of sin and must repent if he does not love his wife as Paul commands or if he harbors bitterness towards her because bitterness will cause a husband to lose his soul (**Heb. 12:15**). A husband must make it his aim to continually love and cherish his wife by providing for her necessities; promoting her physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare; upholding and supporting her; contributing to her happiness; respecting and valuing her contributions; and honoring her as an equal partner in serving the Lord (**1 Pet. 3:7**).

CHILDREN

Col. 3:20 states, “*Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord*.” Children are commanded to “*obey*” their parents. This is one of the rare commands in the Bible strictly limited in application to “*children*.” Yet, this command is still broad in its application because every person is a child of their respective parents.

The Greek word translated as “*children*” in **Col. 3:20** is inclusive of offspring who are under the care and responsibility of their parents. Therefore, until the time they leave the care of their mother and father, children must submit to and “*obey*” their parents “*in all things*” because such obedi-

ence is right and proper in God's sight (**Eph. 6:1**). The only caveat would be when parents expect their child to obey commands which violate the law of Christ (**Acts 5:29**). When a child sincerely obeys his parents "*in all things*," his obedience "*is well-pleasing to the Lord*."

In addition to obeying their parents, children must also "*honor*" and revere them (**Eph. 6:1-3**). Whereas the command to "*obey*" ceases its application when children are no longer under the care and direction of their parents, children must bestow honor upon their parents regardless if they still live in their parent's home or not. A child must continually honor his parents both while he is young as well as into his elderly years. Children honor their parents by obeying them in childhood, then continually showing them respect, kindness, and love all of their days, and supporting them in old age (**1 Tim. 5:4, 8, 16; Mark. 7:9-13**).

In **Eph. 6:1-3**, Paul states that honoring father and mother "*is the first commandment with promise*." There is much debate among Bible students as to what exactly Paul originally intended with this expression. Some contend that Paul's command, which is the fifth of the Ten Commandments, is the first in the Old Law to contain a promise. Yet, all commandments in the Old Law had the promise associating obedience with longevity of life (**Deut. 5:33**). Others argue that this command is the first of the Ten Commandments to contain a specific promise. Yet, such a conclusion overlooks how specific promises are associated with the second and third commandments (**Exod. 20:4-7**). I believe the expression "*first commandment with promise*" carries a twofold meaning. Firstly, the term "*promise*" refers to the fact that living a life of Godly submis-

sion and obedience generally leads to a long life (**Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Prov. 3:1-2, 10:27**). Secondly, "*first commandment*" indicates that the command to obey and honor parents has always been a foremost concern of the Lord (**Exod. 21:15-17; Rom. 1:28-32**).

FATHERS

Lastly, **Col. 3:21**, says, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged*." A father must not "*provoke*," "*antagonize*," (NASB), or "*embitter*" (NIV) his children. If a father does parent in such a way that provokes his children, they can "*become discouraged*." Albert Barnes observed:

"If children are required to '*obey*,' it is but reasonable that the commands of the parent should be such that they can be obeyed, or such that the child shall not be discouraged in his attempt to obey . . . It is the duty of children to obey a parent; but it is the duty of a parent to exhibit such a character, and to maintain such a government, that it would be proper for a child to obey; to command nothing that is unreasonable or improper, but to train up his children in the ways of virtue and pure religion" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament – Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, p.118).

A father must not be dictatorial in how he parents but, rather, nurturing as he rears his son or daughter. Elsewhere, special emphasis is placed upon fathers for training their child in the ways of the Lord (**Eph. 6:4**). It is only logical that this responsibility is placed primarily upon fathers since husbands are the God-ordained heads of their families.

When a parent is unjust or unreasonable towards a child, this will lead to discouragement. Below are several practical

admonitions that parents should consider as they seek to avoid antagonizing their child:

- Never forget that a child is a child and, thus, will make childish mistakes (1 Cor. 13:11).
- Avoid comparing the successes and failures of your child with another child's successes and failures (2 Cor. 10:12).
- Ensure that whatever punishment is employed does not outweigh the act of disobedience (Prov. 20:10, 16:11).
- Beware ever engaging in corporal punishment while angry (Eph. 4:26).
- Do not simply tell your child that you love him; show him he is loved (1 John 3:18).
- Lead by example (Matt. 7:1-4).

These are just a few of many ways that parents can avoid provoking and discouraging their children.

Children must not be left to themselves to learn about the world (Prov. 29:15). To the best that parents can, they should desire to shield their children from temptation as long as is possible. The influence of Godly parents can be seen for generations (Deut. 4:40, 12:25, 28). Conversely, the influence of ungodly parents can also be seen for generations (Zech. 1:4).

CONCLUSION

Every Christian should strive to have the type of home that Col. 3:18-21 requires. People should be able to see Christ's reflection in how we act as wives, husbands, parents, and children. Whether you are a wife, husband, parent, or child, may we all strive to reflect the words of God's faithful servant of old: "*But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Deut. 24:15).

THINK ON THIS

"Meditate on these things"
(Phil. 4:8, NKJV)

Things change, and it is difficult for me when they do. I am one of those who despises change (and it is a fault of mine, I know), but I just like what I like. Nevertheless, one thing is constant in life, and that is change.

I look at pictures and videos of years gone by and see physical changes in myself and others. I see those who were here and are now gone. I see landscape changes and, beyond that, our world is ever-shifting and changing. From politics in Washington to new buildings going up downtown, change is inevitable.

In the midst of an ever-changing world, it is comforting to know that we serve a God who does not change. The God of the Bible is unchanging and unmoved, unswayed by human fickleness or change. When the world is moving too fast for my taste, when life is changing too quickly, it is comforting to know that from the day God spoke to Moses in the burning bush to this present day, He remains unchanged.

God remains faithful, righteous, just, good, holy, and a keeper of His word. In this we can rest while the world shifts from day to day: "*For I am the Lord, I change not*" (Mal. 3:6).

(Kyle Ellison | Alabama, United States, Sep. 2025)

Reasoning With God

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PUBLISHED AUG. 2025 IN THE BROOKHILL CHURCH OF CHRIST BULLETIN

Man can reason with God. That's surprising to me. At Mount Sinai, while Israel is bowing down to a golden calf, God threatened to destroy them all and make a great nation out of Moses (**Ex. 32:10**). In response, Moses reasoned with God that Israel should not be destroyed because the Egyptians would speak evil of God and because of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (**Ex. 32:11-13**). Surely, God was aware of these things already. Nonetheless, God changed His mind and did not destroy Israel. Can you imagine reasoning with God like this?

Many Psalms were written during times of great fear and distress. Death looms and threatens as the Psalmist calls upon God to spare them and save their lives. And then comes the reasoning: *"What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your faithfulness?"* (**30:9**); *"Return, O Lord, rescue my soul; save me because of Your lovingkindness. For there is no mention of You in death; in Sheol who will give You thanks?"* (**6:4-5**). The Psalmist is calling on God saying that he can only worship Him if he is alive. His death would not bring more praise to God but less. For this reason, the Psalmist asks to be spared. The same reasoning is used multiple times (see **Psalm 88:10-12; 115:17-18**).

Hezekiah used the reasoning when he became ill and was informed by Isaiah that he would die. He begged for his life saying, *"For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness. It is the liv-*

ing who give thanks to You, as I do today; a father tells his sons about Your faithfulness" (**Isa. 38:18-19**). In response, God spared Hezekiah. The reasoning worked!

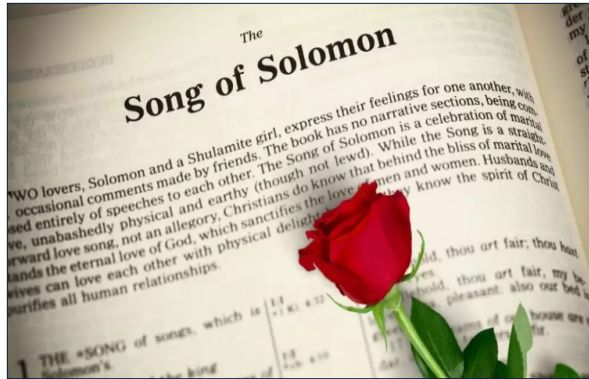
I am surprised such reasoning works. After all, it is not as though God needs us to worship Him. He isn't like the pagan gods who needed followers to gather food for them: *"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things"* (**Acts 17:24-25**). Our worship doesn't sustain Him. Plus, we can easily be replaced. When Jesus was told to silence the worship of His disciples, He said, *"I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out"* (**Luke 19:40**). Despite this, the reasoning of the Psalmists and Hezekiah worked. God didn't need their worship, but He spared them anyway. I suspect that says more about God than anything. We have a God who listens to us and hears our pleas. He is willing to change His mind. It is an amazing relationship we have with our Almighty Creator.

But what really got me thinking was if it would make any sense for me to use the same reasoning as the Psalmists and Hezekiah. Do I worship God so diligently and frequently that it would be a shame if I died? Would there be fewer songs? Would the songs already sung be any harder to hear? Would anything change at all? Am I the type of disciple that can beg for my life on the basis of my worship? Are you?

Poetry, Not Allegory

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PUBLISHED AUG. 2025 IN WHOLE COUNSEL (VOL. 3, NO. 33)



Although scholars have shifted their approach in recent decades, a long-standing perspective on “the Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s” was that it is an allegory of Christ’s love for His bride, the church. This view was preferred simply because some found it awkward to include romantic poetry in Scripture. They wanted it to have a deeper meaning, but that is not warranted.

An oft-repeated theme throughout the book, occurring three times in its eight chapters, is the “charge” laid upon “the daughters of Jerusalem” by the Shulamite to “not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases” (**Song of Songs 2:7; 3:5; 8:4**). This is an admonition toward chastity that deserves appreciation for its straightforwardness. If the Song is some elaborate figure for Christ and the church, it would be difficult to apply an intentional delay to love.

If the Beloved’s admiration for the Shulamite’s bodily features, including breasts, waist, breasts, navel, curvy thighs, and breasts again (**Song of Songs 7:1-9**) causes the reader to squirm, that is understandable but hardly a reason to reassign its meaning and application. There would be a lot more to blush about trying to figure how these anatomical

parts factor into Christ’s love for the church. Instead, it is better to accept that some Scripture, including other of Solomon’s writings, are rather frank about marital satisfaction. Consider: “*Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love*” (**Prov. 5:18-19**). If this is obviously promoting a robust sex-life within the divinely sanctioned confines of matrimony, it should come as little surprise the same inspired penman wrote a drama about his lover.

Dispensing with the complications of twisting romantic poetry into absurd Christological allegory makes it simpler to appreciate a profoundly lyrical love story. Marriage was established by God in the beginning when He told man and woman to “*become one flesh*” (**Gen. 2:24**). Therefore, intercourse within marriage is holy (**Heb. 13:4**). Celebrating that is good.

More awkward than frank appreciation for matrimonial ecstasy is knowing the true meaning of the Song of Songs while hearing its lyrics sampled in hymns praising Jesus. Faith Is the Victory’s “His banner over us is love” and God Be with You’s “Keep love’s banner floating o’er you” are not instantly off-putting since there are varieties of love – romantic, brotherly, and spiritual. Even so, the lyric has been lifted from an obviously romantic context: “*He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick. His left hand is under my head, and his right*

hand embraces me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases” (Song of Songs 2:4-7). The love flying over this Shulamite is making her weak, she is being held by her Beloved, and she urges other young women to abstain from this love until the proper time. That’s a weird love to promote in the context of these hymns. Fortunately, the allusions to this text in hymns appear in verses that can be omitted easily.

Stranger still is calling Jesus the “Rose of Sharon” or the “Lily of the Valley” because these are terms of romantic endearment in the Song. Applying them to Christ is similar to calling Him “Sweetheart,” “Darling,” or “Honey.” That might not be wrong, per se, but most Christians will find it uncomfortable and certainly unnecessary.

Even if one were to accept the notion that the Song of Songs is an allegory for the love of Christ and the church, it would still be inaccurate to apply these terms of endearment to the Lord because they are spoken by the woman! The Shulamite says, *“Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant! Also our bed is green. The beams of our houses are cedar, and our rafters of fir. I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys” (Song of Songs 1:16-2:1).* To this, the Beloved, the man, replies, *“Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters” (2:2).* Thus, even if the debunked theory of allegory fits the theme of the Song, “the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys” would be Christ’s bride, the church, and not Christ Himself. No matter what, it is not accurate.

Unfortunately, these misapplied lyrics pervade “Rose of Sharon” and “Lily of the Valley” and cannot be skipped if the songs are sung at all. Since “*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*” are for “*teaching and ad-*

monishing one another” (Col. 3:16), accuracy counts in music. Some songs are better left out, no matter how enjoyable their tunes.

Regardless of the misapplied lyrics in hymns, the Song of Songs was inspired for a reason, namely to extol marital love. Paul taught, *“Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Cor. 7:3-4).* Or, as the Song puts it: *“I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3).*

MYTH BUSTERS

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

(2 Tim. 4:4, NASB)

1 John 3:18 says, “*Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*” True biblical love is much more than a flippant, “I love you.” True biblical love involves far more than mere words. True biblical love demands we put those words into action. Love that puts truth into action is seen in elevating the needs, liberties, and consciences of others over my own (Phil. 2:2-4; 1 Cor. 8:13). This type of love is seen in serving others (Gal. 5:13-14). This type of love is seen in sacrificing for others (Rom. 13:10). This type of love is seen in doing good to evil-doers (Luke 6:35). And this type of love is seen through obedience to the Lord (John 14:15; Gal. 5:6). What does your love look like?

(DTS)

Lines of Separation

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PUBLISHED AUG. 2025 IN THE VESTAVIA CHURCH OF CHRIST BULLETIN



Christians are taught to walk in love and unity. Paul wrote, *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:1-3). The rest of the chapter shows how this ought to be done.

Those within a local church should never want to divide. Yet churches sometimes split over matters that ought to have been worked out. This is especially a problem when we fail to deny self and follow Christ’s example: *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 2:3-5). Selfishness will cause division, and we need to identify the difference between selfishness (getting what I want) and godliness (doing and being what God wants). If everyone acted like Christ, there would be no divisions.

Unfortunately, divisions occur, but let’s not make the mistake of thinking that

just any differences we may have requires division. **Rom. 14** makes clear that we are to forbear with one another over certain types of issues, even in some cases where the disagreements seem significant to individuals (e.g., clean or unclean was no small matter to them). When would separation become necessary? More can be said, but here are some starting points.

MATTERS OF LIBERTY AND CONSCIENCE

When matters of liberty and conscience are pushed on others, division is inevitable. This is part of the point in **Rom. 14**. If I do what my conscience disallows, I have sinned because I have not acted from faith (v.23). We may need to forego certain rights to help keep peace and make sure we aren’t putting stumbling blocks before others. It is one thing to practice something individually; it is another to push the practice on others so that they participate against their consciences. **Rom. 14** is not about corporate, congregational action, but individual practices. To involve the entire congregation in something means that all within the group are taking part, regardless of consciences. We need to distinguish what we do as individuals from what we expect the whole congregation to do. In **Rom. 14**, both sides of these personal practices (strong and weak) are taught not to despise one another (v.3). Division will occur when we do not respect these principles.

DIVISIVE PEOPLE AND FALSE TEACHERS MUST BE MARKED

Divisive people are to be marked and avoided: *“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch*

out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive” (Rom. 16:17-18). John writes, *“Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” (2 John 9-11).* Separation from such teachers will be necessary if they fail to repent. Several warnings about false teachers are given in Scripture (1 John 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Acts 20:26-32; 3 John; Jude). While we will do all we can to maintain peace, those who fit these categories are not to be tolerated under the umbrella of unity. They have crossed the line and our desire for unity should not white-wash the “*error of lawless people*” who carry others away (2 Pet. 3:17).

THOSE WHO ARE IMMORAL MUST BE MARKED

Those who practice immorality without repentance are to be marked (1 Cor. 5). The church at Corinth was proud that they had tolerated a man who had his father’s wife, but this was not commendable. They were told to “*deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*” (v.5). A division becomes necessary in the face of unrepentant evil because light and darkness cannot coexist (Eph. 5:11).

A CLOSING REMINDER

None of this negates the need to be patient and seek to bring people to repentance. Rev. 2-3 show several congregations where

there were those who were doing right and those who needed to repent. The first action was not to divide, but to instruct. We are not to divide over every point of difference, but neither are we to fail to address and instruct while we have opportunities to do so. There will be those who want to hear the truth and are willing to submit to it. There will be others who will not endure sound doctrine, and their actions might result in divisions. We don’t want division, but neither can we turn aside from truth (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Pursue peace with all, but always keep peace with God first by standing for His truth in love.

SWORD SWIPES

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

The gospel of Christ is designed to transform sinners, not encourage them to remain sinners.

*“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us were baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:1-6).
(DTS)*

Don't Marry a Canannite

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PUBLISHED OCT. 2025 IN **THINK ON THESE THINGS** (VOL. 56, NO. 4)

God cares deeply about whom His people marry. When Abraham commissioned his oldest household servant to find a mate for Isaac, He made him swear that he would not get a woman from the daughters of the Canaanites (**Gen. 24:3**). God then blessed the servant's search and led him straight to Rebekah. The next generation broke family precedent, however: *"When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite"* (**26:34**). These family additions were not a blessing, for *"they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah"* (**26:35**). This bitterness did not dissipate. In the only recorded conversation between Rebekah and Isaac, the distressed matriarch told her husband, *"I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"* (**27:45-46**). As Jacob prepared to flee from his brother's murderous anger, Isaac reiterated Abraham's firm instructions: *"You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women"* (**28:6**). After Jacob left for Paddan-aram to marry into Laban's family, Esau took a third woman (this time from Ishmael's family) because he *"saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father"* (**28:8-9**).

Jacob's burgeoning family eventually moved back to the promised land, where his daughter Dinah attracted the attention of Shechem, a local Hivite lord. In the manner of a worldly prince, Shechem lay with her and enthusiastically negotiated with Jacob's family to marry her. The family patriarch was silent and passive (**34:5**), but Jacob's sons were

vocal and outraged (**31:7, 31**). From the Hivite perspective, Dinah and Shechem's union would lead to more marriage alliances and the eventual absorption of Abraham's family (and their possessions) into their community (**34:9-10, 21-23**). Simeon and Levi, however, put a violent end to this Canaanite plan by butchering the males of the city (**34:25-29**). In doing so, they inadvertently foreshadowed God's eventual plan for all the people of Canaan (**Deut. 7**).

Unfortunately, that event was not the end of Canaanite contamination. Judah, Jacob's fourth-born chose the path of his uncle Esau. He *"saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her"* (**38:2**). Judah's decision was disastrous. He fathered three sons by Shua, but two of them were executed by God because of their wickedness. After Judah's wife died, he lustfully pursued a supposed cult prostitute, but she turned out to be his daughter-in-law – a probable Canaanite herself (**38:1-30**). Judah was not the only brother affected by the lure of local women: in a list of Jacob's descendants, we are told that Simeon's son, Shaul, was *"the son of a Canaanite woman"* (**46:10, Exod. 6:15**). This unnamed woman is especially noteworthy because she is one of only two mothers of that generation mentioned in the entire list (interestingly, the other is Asenath, the Egyptian wife of Joseph and daughter of an idolatrous priest).

What was the purpose of this persistent thread in Genesis? Why were Canaanite-Israelite relationships cast in a negative light? The first hearers of Genesis (the Exodus generation) needed to understand the necessity of

religious purity in the family. They had just left a culture of idolaters and were heading for a land occupied by idolaters. Therefore, with the stories of their ancestors laid as historical foundation, God issued clear instructions as they prepared to enter the promised land: “*You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods*” (**Deut. 7:3-4**). Abraham was chosen to “*command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord*” (**Gen. 18:19**), and this task depended on each generation marrying God-fearing individuals who helped, rather than hindered, the plan. Israelite families who ignored Deuteronomy faced dire spiritual consequences (**consider 1 Kings 16-19**). Think of Solomon, whose heart eventually turned to idols because he clung to idolatrous women (**1 Kings 11:1-4**). Think of the Jews who intermarried during Ezra and Nehemiah’s time, families in which half the children could not even speak the language of God’s law (**Neh. 13:23-27**). These examples were “*written down for our instruction*” (**1 Cor. 10:11**) and their application is clear. In light of these narratives, should a disciple think “I can always convert him/her later?” Isn’t it just as likely that your spouse will convert you to the world or shift your beliefs to a perverted form of the gospel? Do not underestimate the powerful influence wielded by those we love. While soft-hearted outsiders like Rahab and Ruth were rightly welcomed into God’s family, the weight of the Hebrew scriptures strongly warns against marrying unrepentant foreigners.

In the New Testament, it is taken for granted that disciples of Jesus will only marry other disciples. Paul hypothetically asks the Corinthian church, “*Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife?*” (**1 Cor. 9:5**).

When counseling widows earlier in the letter, Paul writes that “*if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord*” (**1 Cor. 7:39**). Clearly, marriage to a disciple was not a special standard for only apostles and gospel ministers.

Marriage is one of the closest partnerships that humans can form. We must not enter it with unresolved differences on foundational questions such as, “What is the purpose of our new family?” or “How does someone become Jesus’ disciple?” or “What kind of local church will we work with?” Although every married couple will differ in small ways (quirks, preferences, etc.), true unity and companionship depend on working for the same goals. Loneliness may tempt us to accept an unsuitable spouse, but loneliness is not relieved by creating a divided life – it is only deepened. As Timothy Keller observes in his book *The Meaning of Marriage*, “If your partner doesn’t share your Christian faith, then he or she doesn’t truly understand it as you do, from the inside. And if Jesus is central to you, then that means that your partner doesn’t truly understand you” (p.209).

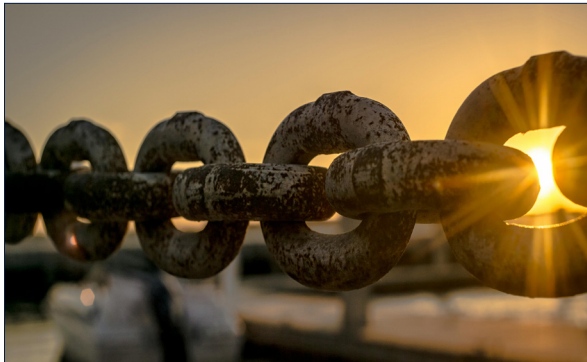
My purpose in writing this article is not to burden Christians who have already bound themselves to non-Christians; believing spouses should remain in their relationships as salt and light (**1 Cor. 7:12-16, 1 Pet. 3:1-2**). Rather, I aim to provoke thought in the unmarried and to aid those who counsel them. Marriage was designed from the beginning as a union between two image-bearers of God who work side by side to increase His blessings on earth (**Gen. 1:26-28**). If Jesus is deeply rooted in the life of a disciple, he or she will look for someone to help them plant His gospel in the hearts of their children, community, and local church. May we look to the Lord to build our houses, so that our building is not in vain (**Psalms 127**).

The New Testament and Slavery

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *If you would like to view a sermon outline wherein I address race, racism, slavery, and interracial marriage, click [here](#).*



Although many who accept the Bible as the inerrant word of God are uncomfortable in admitting it, the holy scriptures have much to say regarding the subject of slavery while never outright denouncing it. The subject of slavery within the Bible is both complex and delicate. The Law of Moses permitted slavery (**Exod. 21; Lev. 25; etc.**). Even under the Law of Christ, slavery is never expressly condemned. Let me repeat that: slavery itself was never condemned or outright abolished by the gospel of Christ. However, the following is proven true across both the Old and New Covenants: **Abusive, prejudicially motivated, forceful slavery with no avenue of escape has always been wrong** (**Lev. 25:39-40; 1 Tim. 1:10**). God never approved of this type of slavery. As such, we should boldly denounce it no matter how far removed in time we (Americans) find ourselves from when this type of slavery existed within our country. Although both the Old and New Covenants permitted slavery, the commencement of the Lord's New Covenant introduced and demanded changes in the attitudes of both servants and masters (**1 Tim.**

6:1-3). These changes, while never expressly prohibiting slavery, do provide undeniable proof that cruel and uncompassionate slavery is not permitted by the New Testament.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SERVANTS

Col. 3:22 teaches that “*bondservants*” are required to “*obey*” their earthly “*masters*.” Yet, mere obedience is not all that the gospel requires from bondservants. Much more than simple obedience, bondservants must obey their masters in the very same manner by which every person must work out their salvation – “*with fear and trembling*” (**Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12**). For Paul to provide these instructions, there obviously were Christian slaves in the churches at Colossae and Ephesus, just like there were slaves in other churches during the first century (**1 Cor. 7:20-24; 1 Pet. 2:18**). Instead of Paul commanding these slaves to defy their masters and rid themselves of their bonds, his inspired advice on one occasion was for Christian slaves to “*remain in that state in which he was called*” (**1 Cor. 7:24**). Yet, at the same time, Paul nowhere commanded slave-masters to treat their servants cruelly. In fact, he taught the exact opposite.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MASTERS

Paul condemned slave trading (NIV), or enslaving (ESV, NASB), in **1 Tim. 1:10**, pronouncing this type of slavery to be “*contrary to sound doctrine*.” Additionally, **Col. 4:1** and **Eph. 6:9** provide undeniable proof that cruel slavery is not supported by the Law of Christ. The Lord's law of liberty requires

masters to be “*just and fair*” with their servants, “*giving up threatening*.” An earthly master is not permitted to act as an unjust tyrant towards his servants. Examining the expression “*just and fair*,” John Gill explained:

“That which is just and equal: proper food and raiment, which is sufficient and fitting for them; the wages due unto them by law or contract; using them with gentleness and humanity, taking care of them when under affliction, and in sickness; encouraging the diligent and laborious by an addition to their salaries; correcting the disobedient within just bounds, not with too much rigour and severity; and carrying it with an even hand to all, not preferring or indulging one before another, without any reason” (Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible, Colossians, p.114).

A master must not demand anything from a servant beyond what he would be willing to do himself if the roles were reversed (**Matt. 7:12**). A master must possess the same characteristics as his servants (**Eph. 6:5-8**). Such is logical since an earthly master is no different than his servants in being subject to the Master in heaven (**Eph. 6:9**). Just as the servant will stand before the Lord to answer for how he served, so too will a master stand before the Lord to answer for how he ruled over his servants (**2 Cor. 5:10**).

PHILEMON AND ONESIMUS

The letter to Philemon provides valuable information on the issue of slavery. Paul wrote this brief letter to request that Philemon would forgive and welcome back his runaway slave, Onesimus, whom Paul converted in Rome. Onesimus, though he had successfully escaped slavery, was voluntarily returning to his master, showing fruits of repentance upon his conversion (**Phile. 8-17**). If slavery was outright condemned, Paul would have

demanded Philemon (a Christian [**Phile. 1, 4-7, 16**]) to release Onesimus from his bonds. Yet, we never see such occurring in scripture. Some have suggested that Paul implied such with the statement, “*Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say*” (**Phile. 21**). However, we cannot know assuredly that Paul was alluding to releasing Onesimus from his bonds. It is impossible to conclusively assert that Onesimus was ever released from his servitude (**to be clear, my opinion is that he eventually was released for reasons I explain in the conclusion of this article**). Onesimus may have been released from his service since Philemon would have been at liberty to release him (**1 Cor. 7:21b**), but he also may not have been released since Philemon was also at liberty to keep him if he so desired. It would be especially odd for Philemon to immediately release Onesimus upon his return given the fact that Paul voiced his intentions to visit within the letter (**Phile. 22**). Again, we must state that slavery in and of itself is not condemned by the New Testament. Therefore, it would be neither wrong nor right for Philemon to respectively keep or release Onesimus upon his return.

Philemon was not under any obligation of New Testament law to release his repentant slave who returned to him. Certain principles of truth may have prompted Philemon to eventually release Onesimus upon his return and upon any potential debts being cleared (**Phile. 18**), but such a release was not required by scripture. Whatever the case, the silence of the scriptures on this matter in no way serves as an approval for the types of cruel and forced slavery evident in the United States for centuries and still existing in some countries today. As already proven, this type of slavery violates the attitude required of slave-masters in **Col. 4:1** and

Eph. 6:9, and is necessarily condemned by the Lord and His apostles' teachings on love, kindness, and compassion that God's people must show everyone, regardless of their position in society (**Luke 10:25-37**). When we harmonize the letter to Philemon with other New Testament passages that directly address slavery or principally apply to the discussion, it is clear that if Philemon continued owning slaves, he would stand in total contrast to the cruel and wicked slave-owners around him. If Philemon put into practice what the New Testament required of him as a slave-master, every bondservant in his city would wish to serve under him rather than the non-Christian masters throughout Colossae.

Although there are many things we do not know regarding the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus, we can say with certainty that their obedience to the gospel brought them together as more than just a slave-owner and slave, respectively. Upon Onesimus's return, the two would be brothers "*in the flesh and in the Lord*" (**Phile. 16**). The conversion of Onesimus, a lowly slave, demonstrates how the gospel renders social statuses irrelevant, with all people able to become equal recipients of God's grace and forgiveness (**Acts 10:34-35; Tit. 2:11-14; John 3:16**). Jesus died for the poor and unprofitable slave just the same as He died for the wealthy slave-owner. Indeed, the gospel is for all (**Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16**). Neither Philemon nor Onesimus were worthy of Christ's sacrifice, but both could equally receive the blessings of it and, subsequently, become equal partners in the kingdom (**Gal. 3:28**), wherein one's social standing, financial circumstances, skin color, etc. are all rendered moot.

CONCLUSION

Although scoffers and people assaulting the word of God claim Christians support

slavery due to the Bible never expressly condemning it, Bible believers should be proud in knowing that Christian principles of love and equality were the primary factors which helped end slavery in the United States. The following is stated on the "Christian Abolitionism" page on Wikipedia, with three sources of evidence cited:

"Although some Enlightenment philosophers opposed slavery, it was Christian activists, attracted by strong religious elements, who initiated and organized an abolitionist movement. Throughout Europe and the United States, Christians, usually from 'uninstitutional' Christian faith movements, not directly connected with traditional state churches, or 'non-conformist' believers within established churches, were to be found at the forefront of the abolitionist movements" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_abolitionism [October, 2025]).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, by emphasizing all of humanity's equality and common origin, worked slowly in abolishing slavery. As many have observed throughout the years, if the Lord demanded a sudden proclamation of emancipation, one can only imagine the bloodshed and destruction that would have taken place. Through His infinite wisdom, the Lord, with the aid of His apostles, set forth principles that slowly caused people to realize how the love, kindness, and compassion He emphasized stood/stands in stark contrast to the social evil that is slavery (I am of the opinion that Philemon, in time, had this same realization). We should be thankful for the abolishment of slavery in our country while continually praying for its abolishment the world-over. If such never occurs, we can only pray for slave-masters to rule in Godly ways and pray for slaves to find true freedom in Jesus Christ.

Questions Answered

OSAMAGBE LESLEY EGHAREVBA | LAGOS, NIGERIA

PUBLISHED OCT. 2025 IN [UNMASKING SOPHISTRY](#) (VOL. 5, NO. 4)

Question: *Why does the King James Version of the Bible use the word “Easter” in Acts 12:4, and is that translation accurate?*

The use of the word “Easter” in Acts 12:4 of the KJV is a mistranslation. The original Greek word used in that verse is “pascha,” which correctly translates to “Passover,” and is accurately rendered in more recent translations, such as the NKJV. Context within the chapter supports this correction.

Acts 12:3 clearly states that the events took place “during the Days of Unleavened Bread.” According to Luke 22:1, “the Feast of Unleavened Bread” is also referred to as “Passover” within the KJV itself. Therefore, since Acts 12:3 situates the narrative during the Days of Unleavened Bread, the following verse (12:4) must also refer to the same period. It follows that Herod intended to bring Peter out after Passover, not Easter.

Additionally, the term “Easter,” as commonly used today, refers to a later religious tradition developed centuries after the time of the apostles. There is no evidence in Scripture that the early church observed a special annual celebration of the resurrection. Instead, Christians in the first century commemorated the Lord’s death and resurrection every first day of the week by partaking of the Lord’s Supper, as instructed in passages such as Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

The use of “Easter” in Acts 12:4 likely reflects the influence of later church traditions familiar to the KJV translators, rather than the actual meaning of the Greek word “pascha,” which referred to the Jewish Passover. Therefore, inserting “Easter” into the text introduc-

es a historical inaccuracy not supported by the original language or New Testament practice.

Question: *Some claim that Adam had a wife before Eve named Lilith. Why is this not mentioned in the Bible, and how should this claim be understood?*

The idea that Adam had a wife named Lilith before Eve is a myth with no basis in Scripture. This notion originates from extra-biblical folklore and mystical writings such as the Alphabet of Ben Sira, a medieval Jewish text, rather than from the inspired Word of God. The Bible, which is given by divine inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21), contains no reference to Lilith as a historical person, nor does it present her as part of the creation account.

Scripture clearly affirms that God created one man and one woman (Adam and Eve) at the beginning. Gen. 2:24 records the creation of Eve from Adam’s side and establishes the divine pattern for marriage. This truth is confirmed by Jesus Himself in Matt. 19:4-6, where He referred to the Genesis account as foundational. There is no biblical warrant for inserting another figure into this narrative.

In matters of faith, we must be responsible to stay within the boundaries of revealed Scripture, to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent. Accepting myths or speculative traditions as truth undermines the sufficiency and authority of God’s Word. Therefore, the claim that Lilith was Adam’s first wife should be rejected as unfounded and contrary to the inspired record.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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

A Common Treasury

CARROL SUTTON

PUBLISHED MAR. 1998 IN THE INSTRUCTOR (VOL. 35, NO. 3)

Under the Old Law, we learn that God’s people had a treasury. In **Josh. 6: 19** we read of “*the treasury of the Lord*,” and in **v.24** we find the expression, “*the treasury of the house of the Lord*.” In **Luke 21:1-4**, “*the treasury*” which contained “*the offerings of God*” is mentioned. Money was cast into the treasury (see also **Mark 12:41-44; Matt. 27:6**).

We learn from **John 12:6** that Judas “*had the bag, and bare what was put therein*” (see also **John 13:29**). **NOTE:** It is thought by some that this “*bag*” contained “a common fund” for the Lord and His disciples as they labored as servants of God. Disciples of Christ in the first century (after the church began in **Acts 2**) brought money and laid it “*down at the apostles’ feet*” (see **Acts 4:34-37; 2:44-45; 5:1-11**). This indicates the existence of a common treasury or fund among the early Christians. Churches were also “*given order*” concerning “*the collection for the saints*” (**1 Cor. 16:1**). This indicates that churches were to have a “*collection*,” or a fund or treasury.

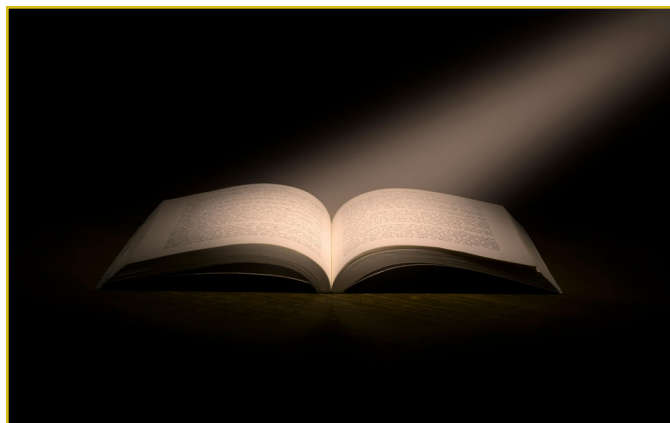
In **1 Cor. 16:2** Paul said, “*Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.*”

OBSERVATIONS: (1) This was an order, not merely a suggestion! It required giving according to one’s prosperity! (2) The giving was to be done “*upon the first day of the week.*” (3) The purpose of the order was to eliminate the necessity of gatherings when Paul arrived. Unless the collection was made in advance of

Paul’s coming, gatherings would need to be made when he arrived. The fact that collections were to be made “*on the first day of every week*” (NASB) is proof of a common fund or treasury! (4) The context suggests the idea of a common fund that would be available for saints in Jerusalem (who were needy) when the apostle Paul arrived. (5) This particular collection was to relieve poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul stated that when he came to Corinth that he would bring whomever the church at Corinth had approved by their letters to bring their “*liberality*” (or gift, bounty, contribution, benevolence) unto Jerusalem.

The fact that Paul received wages from churches indicates that churches had funds out of which those wages were paid (see **2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:15-16**). If there is no common treasury, churches cannot pay wages to preachers as they did to Paul in **2 Cor. 11:8**, neither can they function as collectivities in the field of edification or in the relief of saints when money is required! (see **Eph. 4:11-12, 16; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-24; 9:1-15; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 5:16; etc.**).

1 Cor. 16:1-4 is the only passage that tells us when Christians are to “*lay by him in store*” for a work of the churches as collectivities. We learn from this and other passages how churches are to use their funds. In the absence of other instructions, let us be content with laying by in store on the first day of the week into a common fund that churches may fulfill their responsibilities!



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