

The Whole Counsel of God

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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 2026

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

In this month's edition of the journal, we have placed a special emphasis on the subject of church discipline. We have included several articles, both long- and short-form, to remind us of what the New Testament teaches on this often neglected and emotionally charged subject. I pray you will give careful consideration to the information presented in these articles.

Additionally, we have included various other articles such as, "*The Underworld*," which discusses the place known Hades – the realm of the dead; "*Is Agreeing Important?*;" and an expository study of Philippians 2:12-13 titled, "*Continue God's Work in You*." We sincerely hope that the aforementioned articles and all others that we have included in this month's edition of the journal will serve to strengthen your faith in the Lord.

I would like to add that, as mentioned in the previous edition of the journal, I am currently teaching a class on Philippians at the East Albertville church of Christ in Albertville, Alabama. I will continue teaching that class through March 30th, 2026, God permitting. If you would like to join us as we look into these most important matters together, I know I, as well as the brethren at East Albertville, would love to share in the gospel with you. If you are unable to attend in-person but would like to follow along with our class, click [here](#) to access the church's YouTube livestream and video archive.

Thank you for all the encouragement that you continue to 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 and use you as a tool for good in His kingdom.

(DTS)



Table of Contents

The Underworld	4
A Question About Church Discipline	6
Spiritual Leaven	7
Myth Busters	9
Painting With a Broad Brush	10
Think on This.	11
Is Agreeing Important?.	12
Continue God's Work in You	15
Sword Swipes	18
Falling From Grace	19

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The Underworld

BRYAN DOCKENS | NEW MEXICO, UNITED STATES

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Phil. 2:10 reads, “*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.*” That there are souls “*under the earth*” speaks to the existence of an underworld, what the Old Testament called “*Sheol*,” for this realm of the dead is always referred to as being downward, as Isaiah prophesied of Nebuchadnezzar, “*You shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit*” (**Isa. 14:15**). It is described as “*Sheol beneath*” (**Prov. 15:24**) and its depths are contrasted to heaven’s heights (**Isa. 7:11**).

Sheol is often referred to as equivalent with death or the grave (**1 Sam. 2:6; Prov. 30:3**), and is thus a place to avoid (**Prov. 23:14**). However, it is not exclusively a place of punishment. Jacob knew he would eventually go to Sheol (**Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31**), and Jesus affirmed that Jacob would be “*in the kingdom of heaven*” hereafter (**Matt. 8:11**). Therefore, it is correctly understood as the immediate destination of all who die, righteous and unrighteous alike.

What the Old Testament, written in Hebrew, identifies as “*Sheol*” (**Psalms 16:10**), the New Testament, written in Greek, translates as “*Hades*” (**Acts 2:27**), borrowing the term from Greek mythology that applied as both the name belonging to the lord of the underworld and to the underworld itself. This is not an endorsement of their gods, but an inspired commandeering of their word in much the same way “*Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron*” (**2 Kings 1**), a Philistine idol, became “*Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons*” (**Matt. 12:24**), referring to Satan. Sheol, the Pit, is Hades. Hades is where Jesus visited but did

not remain when He died: “*concerning the resurrection of the Christ ... His soul was not left in Hades*” (**Acts 2:31**). Hades, which literally means “unseen,” is the immediate destination of all who die, composed of two distinct realms.

Jesus told the thief on the cross, “*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*” (**Luke 23:43**). Because it is known Christ had been in Hades while dead (**Acts 2:27, 31**), it is right to conclude that Hades contains Paradise, which is also referred to as “*the third heaven*” (**2 Cor. 12:2-4**). Accordingly, it is accurate to say the blessed go to heaven immediately upon death, even if that is not “*the highest heavens*” (**Dan. 10:14**).

While Hades does contain Paradise, there is more to it. Jesus preached, “*The beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us’*” (**Luke 16:22-26**). The rich man went to Hades (**v.23**) where he was tormented in flame (**v.24**). His destination was on the opposite side of “*a great gulf*” (**v.26**) from a certain

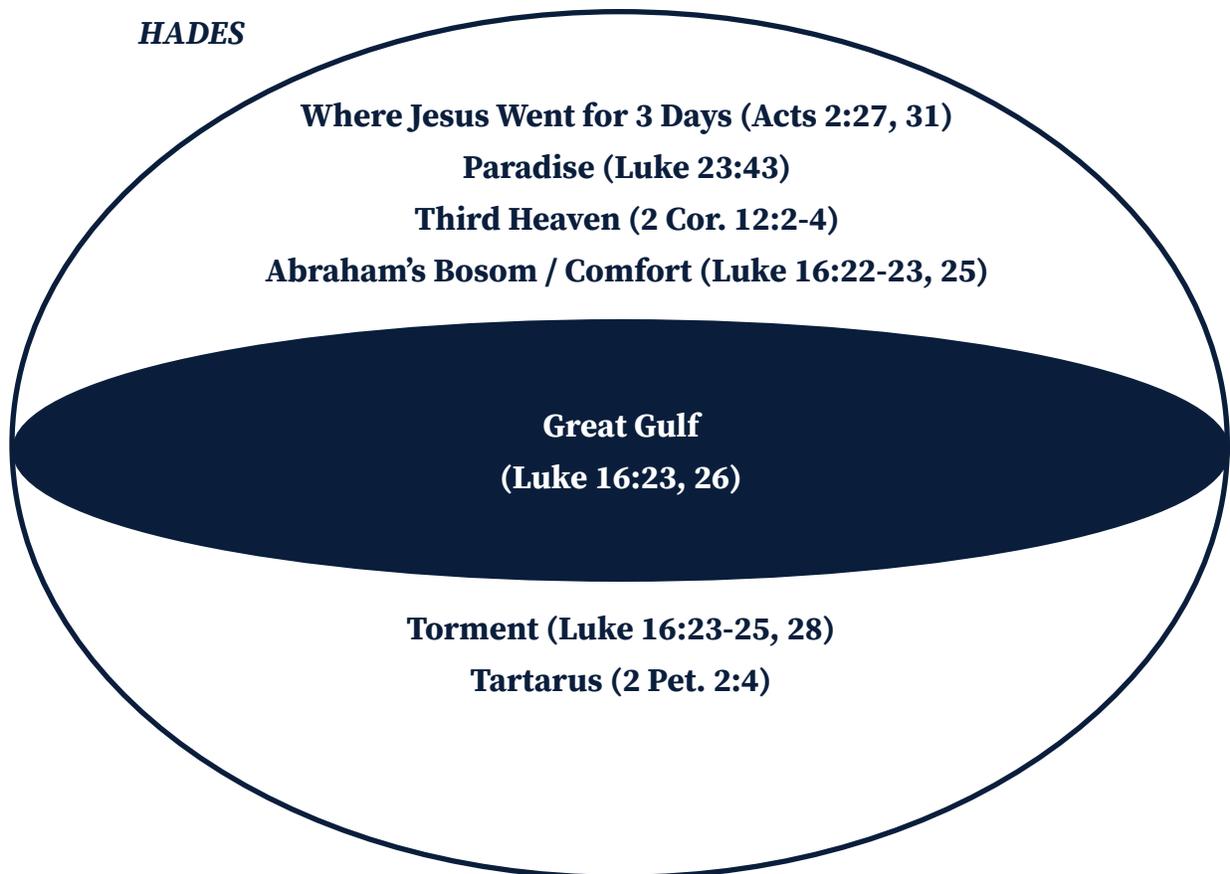
man named Lazarus who received comfort (v.25) in Abraham's bosom (v.22-23).

A deeper area of the torment side of Hades, or possibly below it, is Tartarus. This is another word describing the hereafter that inspiration co-opted from Greek mythology, referring to the place where not mere mortals but the Titans themselves were punished. This term appears only once in Scripture and is unhelpfully translated as "hell" though it is a very different Greek word than the one ordinarily translated that way. It is written, "God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [Tartarus] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). Wicked angels are already being punished in Tartarus, yet they await their final judgment. In the ultimate judgment (Matt. 25:31), cursed men and cursed angels will share the same abode (v.41). Whether that commonality will com-

mence only at the last day or is already underway is uncertain.

Hades is not permanent for every soul. John wrote, "I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:12-15). When comes the judgment of the dead, the place where they have been waiting will be cast into the same Lake of Fire, the Second Death, where the damned will suffer eternally.

HADES



A Question About Church Discipline (Abbreviated)

JEFFREY HAMILTON | NEBRASKA, UNITED STATES
PUBLISHED OCT. 2025 AT [LA VISTA CHURCH OF CHRIST](#)

Rev. 22:11 says, “*Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.*”

Rev. 22:11 appears between two warnings that things foretold would occur soon. The wicked would ignore the warnings Jesus gave, but the righteous were encouraged to remain faithful. The Lord would be just in holding both groups of people accountable (**Rev. 22:12; 2 Cor. 5:10**). Although some hold the view that discipline should be left to God on the last day, using **Rev. 22:11** as a proof text, it is a mistake to claim one verse cancels out commands found in other verses. Churches are commanded to judge those within its membership (**1 Cor. 5:12**). Withdrawal must occur when a Christian refuses to cease his sin. Whenever withdrawals occur, the question is often raised as to whether the church should inform other congregations about this development. Should the withdrawing church alert other churches in case the erring Christian attempts to place membership at another congregation?

Firstly, congregations need to accept that just because someone shows up at the door, it does not mean they are faithful brethren. When dealing with someone they don't know, it would be prudent for any congregation to inquire about their background and verify the information. There are people who lie and mislead. To ignore this simple fact is dangerous and naive. The congregation in Jerusalem was reluctant to allow Saul in as a member, and for good reasons, until they had

evidence that Saul had truly converted (**Acts 9:26-27**).

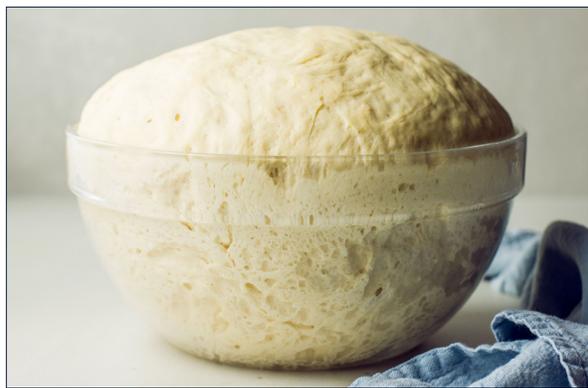
When a Christian or congregation knows that a wayward member is going elsewhere, concern for other brethren demands that some warning be given. Paul told Timothy, “*This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme*” (**1 Tim. 1:18-20**). In his second letter to Timothy, Paul also informed his brother, “*Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica ... Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words*” (**2 Tim. 4:10, 14-15**).

Today, congregations have been sued for libel for sending out warnings regarding disfellowshipped members. Yet, it still can be done. Notice that Paul's warnings told us who were causing problems, but the details of the problems were left unstated. Those who lost lawsuits did so because too much information was relayed. Notably, the examples of warnings are in letters that went to individuals. I'm not certain if we should conclude that it should always be done that way or not, but certainly, in touchy situations, a discreet letter to key individuals will at least give people a warning.

Spiritual Leaven

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PUBLISHED MAY 2025 AT [BROOKHILL CHURCH OF CHRIST](#)



“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” This is a proverb and warning which is repeated twice in the Bible (**1 Cor. 5:6**; **Gal. 5:9**). Leaven is a substance that causes dough to rise. We usually use yeast as our leavening agent for bread these days. If your goal is to have unleavened bread, then no amount of yeast is acceptable. For, just as the proverb states, it only takes a little leaven to contaminate the entire batch of dough. Leaven spreads. This is the point of the proverb. There are some things which are so dangerous to everyone around them that they cannot be permitted to stay in contact. Specifically, there are two things which act as spiritual leaven

1 CORINTHIANS 5:6

Sin is a spiritual leaven. Its corrupting influence spreads, and it doesn't take much to defile everything. This is the main point of the proverb in **1 Cor. 5:6**. There was a man in the church of Corinth who was openly living in sin. It was a grotesque sin (sleeping with his father's wife), but it was just his sin. The whole church wasn't involved in that sexual sin. They were innocent; undefiled; unleavened. But the church had remained in fellow-

ship with this individual rather than removing him from their midst (**1 Cor. 5:2, 13**). In that context, Paul warns of the outcome of a single sinner being permitted to coexist in the church: *“A little leaven, leavens the whole lump.”* What starts with one man, will spread to others.

Early history bears this out. The downfall of mankind began with one person. Eve decided she was going to eat of the forbidden fruit. Next thing you know, Adam has joined her. They did it once, but sin didn't stop there. It kept spreading. Next, we see Cain killing Abel (**Gen. 4**). Then we discover that *“the wickedness of man was great on the earth”* (**Gen. 6:5**). What started with one person spread and defiled everyone.

This truth is not limited to sexual perversions either. That may have been the focus with the Corinthians, but that wasn't Adam and Eve's problem or Cain's either. Additionally, Jesus warned of the leaven of the Pharisees, which he specifies on one occasion to be hypocrisy (**Luke 12:1**). Even the Corinthians were warned about covetousness, idolatry, revilers, drunkards and swindlers, in addition to the concern about sexual immorality (**1 Cor. 5:11**). All of these have a defiling influence which spreads insidiously.

Sin can spread in multiple ways. First, it can spread by creating more of the same sin. Sexual immorality creating more sexual immorality. Second, it can spread by creating different types of sin. When a person sees that sin is not punished or rebuked, they might be encouraged to carelessly engage in a differ-

ent form of sin, in which case the sexual immorality of one man leads to drunkenness in the next. Third, it can spread by making the innocent guilty. Those who do not engage in a sinful behavior but give hearty approval of it become guilty themselves. A clean man cannot hug a filthy man without becoming filthy. The Bible says, *“The one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds”* (2 John 10-11). We do not want to *“share responsibility for the sins of others”* but, rather, keep ourselves free from sin (1 Tim. 5:22). Which problem was the Corinthian church facing? We are not told. Maybe all of them. But the solution was obvious if you knew the problem: *“Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump”* (1 Cor. 5:7).

If sin is a spiritual leaven, does that mean we must remove everyone who has ever sinned? If so, then we would all be hermits, removing everyone from our lives and being removed from everyone else’s lives. Paul clarifies, *“I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world...for then you would have to go out of the world”* (1 Cor. 5:10). Total avoidance from all people is not the goal or the solution. However, if there is a Christian who publicly, willfully, and continually lives in sin, that man’s influence must not be ignored. He has become spiritual leaven and the whole church is in danger.

GALATIANS 5:9

Someone in the Galatian churches was teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Paul responded by saying that *“if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.”* Demanding circumcision was the same as demanding that people follow the Law of Moses. Paul identifies the danger of this teaching stating *“you have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen*

from grace” (Gal. 5:4). This false teaching was a serious threat. But it was also leaven. Paul stated, *“This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough”* (Gal. 5:8-9).

We can easily see the danger of this false teaching. It was separating people from Christ (Gal. 5:4); it was hindering people from following the truth (Gal. 5:7); it was not from God (Gal. 5:8); and, finally, it would act like leaven. A little false teaching is a dangerous thing. The false teaching itself wasn’t little (or insignificant), but it only took a few people teaching it for it to spread and become a massive problem.

Jesus also taught that false teaching was like leaven. He warned His apostles to *“beware the leaven”* of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:6). The apostles misunderstood and thought Jesus was talking about bread (Matt. 16:7). Jesus corrected them, then they understood that *“He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees”* (Matt. 16:12).

The famous saying from Paul – *“Do not be deceived, evil companions corrupt good morals”* (1 Cor. 15:33) – does not come in a chapter about young people being rebellious and wicked but in a chapter where some people were teaching that there was no such thing as resurrection. Don’t be deceived about such a teaching. Not only was it false, but it had the dangerous ability to spread and corrupt the morality of many Christians.

There were others who were teaching that the resurrection had already taken place. Regarding them, Paul warned that their defiling influence would also spread. It would lead to further ungodliness (2 Tim. 2:16), *“spread like gangrene”* (2 Tim. 2:17),

and had already “*upset the faith of some*” (2 Tim. 2:18).

Clearly, God wants us to understand the danger of false teaching. This presents a great challenge for all of us. First, we must be able to identify what constitutes a false teaching. If a person teaches anything that we disagree with will that qualify? It does not seem to be that simple, as there are areas where we can have differing opinions and still all be right with God (Rom. 14:1-4). But we must conclude that not all differences in doctrine are harmless opinions. Some cross the line into false teaching. Fortunately, Paul gave us the best solution to this problem: “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15). Diligence and using the Bible correctly will be the key to our success.

Second, we must put a stop to the false teaching. If we are being warned that false teaching is like leaven, then we must find some way of keeping it from influencing us and the ones we love. **It matters who we allow to teach and what we allow to be taught. It also matters who and what we listen to.**

A preacher friend of mine recently warned that most of the youths today are getting their doctrine from memes and video clips on social media. That is terrifying! It probably isn't limited to the young people either. Be warned, not everything is worth listening to. Not every discussion is harmless. Be careful what you take in and be careful what you share because false teaching is like a little leaven that leavens the whole lump of dough.

MYTH BUSTERS

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

(2 Tim. 4:4, NASB)

Recently, I have noticed a trend among brethren claiming there are specific formalities that must be followed when withdrawing from erring brethren. However, we need to remember that there are no specific formalities or procedures for withdrawal beyond what is discussed in Matt. 18:15-17 and 1 Cor. 5. To bind specific formalities and procedures that God has not specifically bound is to go beyond the authority and doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). As David Lipscomb explained, “There is no specific form of withdrawal given in the New Testament; but when a member violates the word of God and cannot be induced to reform his life and make amends for his wrongs, it ought to be so stated before the whole church, and that the church can no longer fellowship the individual till he reforms his life ... The word of God is plain and says to withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly ... These things must be done, but they need no specific formalities or resolutions to do them. We must not establish fixed formalities where God has established none ... Where things are commanded and no specific form is given, do them in the simplest way, as the circumstances demand, and fix no formulas” (Questions Answered by Lipscomb and Sewell, p.725).

(DTS)

Painting With a Broad Brush

JOHN GIBSON | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED FEB. 2014 AT PEPPER ROAD CHURCH OF CHRIST



While it is unfair to judge a group, whether it is a school's fan base or a local church, by the words and actions of few, is it not equally unwise to fail to see a widespread problem because there are a few exceptions?

By way of illustration, consider the warning against false teachers that appears in **2 Pet. 2**. In this chapter, they are described as:

- secretly bringing in destructive heresies (v.1)
- involved in covetousness or greed (v.3)
- presumptuous (v.10)
- self-willed (v.10)
- willing to speak against dignitaries (v.10)
- speaking evil of things they didn't understand (v.12)
- engaged in carousing or revelry (v.13)
- having eyes full of adultery (v.14)
- unable to cease sinning (v.14)
- making their appeal to people through the lusts of the flesh and lewdness (v.19)

Are we to understand that every false teacher would possess all ten of these characteristics?

If just one person could have been found who was teaching the same error as the others but lacked "*eyes full of adultery*," would the readers have then been able to dismiss the apostle's warnings with a comment about him painting with too broad a brush? While I can't imagine anyone doing that, the broad brush criticism is frequently used to dismiss warnings that are sounded about various teachings and practices.

You can preach a lesson on the importance of Christians marrying Christians and cite Old Testament warnings such as the one found in **Deut. 7:1-4**, point out the difficulty of rearing children as **Eph. 6:4** demands, look at the importance of the proper companions as in **Prov. 12:26** and **1 Cor. 15:33**, along with several other biblical principles, only to have your sermon dismissively waved off with an anecdote about someone who maintained their faith, converted their spouse, and raised several godly children. You may be rebuked for painting with too broad a brush, but have you? Are those principles not valid? Do the exceptions, and they do exist, really mean that Christians should not be concerned about marrying Christians?

Suppose you warn against the doctrine of once saved always saved and point out that when people do not believe falling to be possible, they are less likely to take heed that they not do so (**1 Cor. 10:12**). What if you say that believing in the impossibility of being lost can promote carelessness in one's service to God (**Jude 4**), but someone finds an avid believer in this doctrine who strives with all his might and to the best of his understanding to walk upright before God. Have they rendered

your argument invalid? Have they somehow disproven the danger of believing a doctrine that goes against **1 Cor. 10:1-13; Gal. 5:4; Heb. 10:26-31; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; et al?**

When we deal with widespread doctrinal error, we must sometimes speak in broad, general terms about attitudes, applications, dangers, etc., as was done in **Col. 2; Gal. 4-5; 2 Pet. 2; Jude 1**; and other passages, simply because we cannot examine every teacher individually. Will one be able to find a promoter of whatever error is in question whose character seems impeccable and is not guilty of the prideful presumption with which we might have described the movement? Al-

most certainly, but does that allow the warning to be disregarded as simply painting with too broad of a brush? That there are some whose character and motives are different from the majority doesn't change anything about the danger of the error being promoted and should not distract us from the real problem.

While it is possible to paint with too broad a brush and unfairly indict a group, let's not allow ourselves to be distracted from important principles and teachings by some exceptions that might seem to have gotten a little paint splattered on them.

THINK ON THIS

“Meditate on these things”

(Phil. 4:8, NKJV)

“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:11-15).

Read through this passage again. Read it slowly. Try to picture in your mind's eye the scene. This is our ultimate destiny. Every soul who has ever lived – we're all going to be standing some day before the great white throne. All of us. The books will be opened. A record of all our works. Things we wished we never did. Things we wished we never said. Things we wish we could forget. They're all there. All of our deeds. All of our words. All of our thoughts. And then THE book will be opened – the Book of Life. Our names will either be in that book, or not. If our name is not written there, our eternal destiny will be sealed. No second chances. No do overs. Only an eternity of regret, of darkness, and of torment.

Think about this scene. Meditate on it. Now, do what you need to do to get ready for it!

**Abbreviated* (David Maxson | Alabama, United States, Dec. 2025)*

Is Agreeing Important?

RUBEN HALL | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED JUL. 2020 AT [EAST ALBERTVILLE CHURCH OF CHRIST](#)



When using the scriptures to show God's authority, or the lack thereof, for some act or practice, it has been my experience that people often become annoyed and usually want to completely stop discussing whatever the subject. To bring a close to the conversation and let it be known they don't wish to continue the discussion, they often say, "Well, that's just the way you see it. We can't all agree on everything. Some things are just too hard to understand. We just have to do what we each of us feel is right." I even had a friend once say while discussing the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship, "Well we can agree to disagree on that. I don't think that should keep us from fellowshiping." Agreeing to disagree is the basis of a false and absurd doctrine often referred to as "unity in diversity," which teaches we can somehow be united while all believing differently concerning God's word. Try meshing this teaching with Jesus' prayer in **John 17:11, 20-21** and with Paul's exhortations to the Corinthians in **1 Cor. 1:10** and you'll see why its false and absurd.

It seems that agreeing on the teaching found within God's written word simply isn't important to many people. Since we suppos-

edly "can't all agree on everything" there is no real need to try to do so, right? Let's just all agree upon disagreeing and we'll all get to Heaven. We'll just take different routes. Is this indeed true? Is agreeing important, or can we all just believe the way we desire and be pleasing to God?

First, let us examine the statement, "We can't all agree on everything." Is this really true? Why can't we agree? Isn't this exactly what Jesus was praying for and what Paul was pleading to the Corinthians concerning in the previously mentioned verses?

In **John 8:31-36**, Jesus told those that believed on Him that if they continued in His word that they would know the truth and the truth would make them free from sin. What is truth? The word that they were to continue in, God's word (**v.28**), was truth according to Jesus. In **John 17:17** we again find it specifically stated that God's word is truth. So by the very fact that there is truth, there must be error or false beliefs, doctrines, and concepts. Concerning God's word/truth, Paul told Timothy in **2 Tim. 3:16** that "*all scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" Since it is God's word/truth that thoroughly furnishes unto all good works and makes one free from sin, why can't we agree on its meaning? Jesus very plainly said that if we continue in his word we would know the truth.

Now, certainly, there are things contained in God's word that "*are hard to be un-*

derstood” (2 Pet. 3:16), but does this mean they can’t be understood and understood alike? Are we saying that the omnipotent and just God of the universe that created all things couldn’t or didn’t create a book containing His word that we could all understand alike? Is this “non-understandable” word still going to judge us in the last day (John 12:48)? I, for one, do not intend to make such statements or even imply such. However, when we make statements such as, “We can’t all agree,” we are boldly inferring just that!

There is a growing push toward not “overly” concerning ourselves with trying to know and agree on the truth but, instead, just making sure our hearts are right and we are sincere in what we believe and teach. Certainly, having the right kind of heart and being sincere in our beliefs and teachings is critically important (Matt. 5:8, 13:15, 15:19). If our hearts are not right and we are not sincere, why would we even have beliefs or care enough to teach them? Having the right kind of heart and being sincere is but the first step in knowing and agreeing on the truth. Many men are leading others away from the truth and telling them that our interpretation of the Bible and, therefore, how we establish Bible authority has very little to do with our salvation, instead it is our hearts that matter. This kind of doctrine breeds disagreement in its followers and teaches that it is okay as long as we are all sincere. While this may be a warm and fuzzy doctrine that brings great comfort to many who are practicing and living in sin while believing they are living godly lives, it is false and will cause many to lose their souls.

We read that the first century Christians “were of one heart” (Acts 4:32). How can we possibly be of one heart if we all don’t believe the scriptures alike? How we

interpret the scriptures and how we establish Bible authority for all that we do as Christians is of utmost importance. Therefore agreeing is of utmost importance as well. Our souls depend on it because we will be judged by God’s word (John 12:48). We are told that whatever we do “in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17). How can we do something in someone’s name for which they gave us no authority?



The apostle Paul said in 2 Tim 2:15, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” What a preacher says, what our loved ones believe, nor what we sincerely but mistakenly thought the Bible said is going to approve us before God. It is study that will approve us unto God. It was those at Berea who were more noble than those at Thessalonica because “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Recall from John 8 that it is Christ’s word/truth that makes us free, but only on the condition that we continue in it (v.31). This is how we learn or know God’s will. This is how we are freed from our sins. This is how we agree on God’s word and become of “one mind” (Rom. 15:16; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 1:27, 2:2; 1 Pet. 3:8). We must continue in the scriptures that

are by God's inspiration and that thoroughly furnish us. We must have a sincere, open and receptive heart and study God's word in light of it (**Acts 8:30-35**).

Disagreement, at its root, is the result of man's will conflicting with God's will. Whether we admit it or not, it starts as man's desire to do something for which God's word has given no authorization. Thus, men go about twisting and perverting scripture, lifting it from its context to "prove" their positions (**2 Pet. 3:16**). Or, perhaps, sometimes they even seek to "find" authority through some other means than the Bible (the Pope, church creeds, etc), or maybe they just all together do away with the need for authority (at least in their own minds) and let their heart be their guide. After all, it is to them a "sincere" effort to serve God, even though it is as they so desire and not necessarily as God would have it. Then, disagreement comes full circle when someone questions another person's actions or practices based on scripture. As we can see, the problem is that we let our desires and wishes take precedence over God's desires and wishes. God certainly has desires and wishes (**1 Tim. 2:4**). The pages of His word are filled with His will for man and give "*us all things that pertain unto life and godliness*" (**2 Pet. 1:3**).

Sadly, there is not an easily executed solution to resolve disagreement. Yet, just to avoid discussing it and take comfort that we are somehow pleasing to God when we mutually agree to disagree is a terrible mistake. It is a mistake that will lead to more division and more souls being lost. As before stated, it requires sincere and continual study of God's word to "*know the truth*" (**John 8:31**). It demands studying the Bible to establish God's will, not searching the Bible in an

effort to prove our own (**Acts 17:11**). This involves putting aside our emotions. This is never a simple task when the beliefs that we may hold so strongly and feel so deeply about come under attack. Yet, it has to be done to see and accept the truth.

Was it easy for the children of Israel to see and accept the truth? Certainly not. After all, they killed the Messiah and many others whom taught the truth (**Acts 2:36, 7:54-58**). Was it easy for Saul/Paul to see and accept the truth? Apparently it wasn't because it took Christ appearing to Him while on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians to change his life (**Acts 9:1-3**). Was Paul sincere in his persecuting of Christians? Did he think he was doing God's will? Unquestionably he did and even said so (**Acts 22:3-5**). Did his sincerity make it right and justify him before God? Certainly, it did not.

It may seem that it would be much easier for us today to see, accept, and agree on the truth if we had a personal encounter with Christ as Paul, but keep in mind we don't need that. We, unlike Paul, have God's inspired word in its entirety and neatly contained in one bound book at our disposal (**1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17**). It's just a matter of actually using it. Let's earnestly use it and learn the truth so that we can all agree in our beliefs. It is vitally important because God's truth is absolute. It does not change in meaning depending upon the person, neither the situation, nor from generation to generation (**2 Pet. 1:20; Psa. 100:5**). If you and I each hold to a different belief it means that at least one of the beliefs is erroneous. So, let us search the scriptures to ensure that our belief is, indeed, truth and then hold fast to it (**Prov. 23:23**).

Continue God's Work in You

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Phil. 2:12-13 reads, “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*” In these two verses, the apostle Paul presents one of the New Testament’s most profound and balanced statements regarding salvation in Christ. On the one hand, believers are commanded to take their salvation seriously – to labor faithfully, diligently, and reverently in bringing it to completion. On the other hand, believers are assured that God Himself is actively at work within them, strengthening their resolve and guiding their efforts according to His gracious purpose. Far from being contradictory, these two truths stand side-by-side: human responsibility and divine activity operate together in the process of salvation. A careful examination of each verse reveals both the solemn obligation placed upon the Christian and the great comfort supplied by God’s continual involvement in man’s salvation.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12 – MAN’S WORK

In **Phil. 2:12**, Paul directs his attention to the believer’s present possession of salvation. He speaks of “*your own salvation*,” indicating that salvation is not merely a future hope reserved for the day of judgment, but a present possession enjoyed by those who are faithfully walking in Christ. While scripture clearly teaches that eternal salvation will only be fully realized on the last day, it also affirms that Christians can know that they presently possess eternal life.

The apostle John repeatedly addressed the fact that believers currently possess salvation. Arguably, the most prominent example is found in **1 John 5:11-13**, where the apostle wrote, “*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (see also **John 3:36; John 5:24; John 6:47; John 6:54; 1 John 3:15**). At the same time, scripture is equally clear that salvation can be forfeited if one ceases to walk faithfully. To use John’s words, if one does not “*continue to believe in the name of the Son of God*” and, thus, continue to obey Him, a believer will stop having eternal life. If a Christian stops doing what **1 John 1:5-10** teaches (confessing and repenting of sins) we will lose our salvation. Yet, if we walk in the light by seeking to abstain from sin, all the while*

confessing our sins and repenting of them whenever we do sin, Christians can lay in bed at night with peace and confidence that we possess eternal life. Salvation, therefore, is both something presently enjoyed while also being something yet to be realized. As **Phil. 2:12** teaches, salvation must be brought to its end – the final saving of the soul – where we will not just possess eternal life but be able to fully partake in it.

In **Phil. 2:12**, Paul also emphasizes that salvation is something believers must “*work out.*” This does not suggest that salvation is earned through human merit. Rather, Christians must take responsibility in fulfilling their role in God’s plan of salvation. God has done His part in devising and providing the means of redemption (**Eph. 1-2**), and He never ceases in His work of salvation for the believer, as **v.13** demonstrates. Nevertheless, human beings must respond with continual faith and obedience. As **Heb. 5:9** states, “*And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.*” Salvation must be brought to completion, and this requires continual, life-long obedience on the part of the believer in order to successfully work out his salvation to the final saving of the soul. Christians are not required to work for our salvation – such would be an impossible task (**Rom. 11:5-6; Eph. 2:8-9**) – but we are commanded to work out our salvation to completion.

To labor successfully towards this end, Paul insists that the believer must possess a spirit of “*fear and trembling.*” This language reflects reverence, humility, and awe in service of a most high and holy God (**Ecc. 12:13; Isa. 66:2 1 Pet. 1:17**). The attitude described here demands a deep respect for God’s authority and a sober awareness of what is at stake – the salvation of our souls! Additionally, although Paul is not specific-

ly referring to fear in the sense of terror, it is worth noting that we, indeed, should remember that it is “*a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (**Heb. 10:31**). While this type of fear is not the sole motivation for obedience, it is a legitimate and necessary one considering the eternal destiny of our souls is at stake. Therefore, we must be all the more careful as we work out our salvation humbly and reverently, recognizing how lowly we are in comparison to the all-wise and all-powerful Father in Heaven.

Lastly, Paul stresses the individual nature of salvation by speaking of “*your own*” salvation. No one can obey God on another person’s behalf. Every person must come to Christ on his own volition (**Matt. 11:28; Rev. 3:20; etc.**), and each person must continue thereafter living for Christ on his own (**Gal. 2:19-20; etc.**). Every individual will stand before the Lord to answer for what he has and has not done; no one will answer by proxy for him (**2 Cor. 5:10; Ezek. 18:19-22**). Responsibility in working out our salvation cannot be transferred; that responsibility rests squarely upon each individual soul.

PHILIPPIANS 2:13 – GOD’S WORK

After stressing the importance of man’s work in his salvation, Paul adds an extraordinary statement that balances his exhortation: “*For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*” If believers were left entirely to themselves to work out their salvation, it would be a fruitless endeavour. Jesus plainly said, “*Without Me you can do nothing*” (**John 15:5**). Christ’s words would necessarily include what Paul stated in **Phil. 2:12**. Thus, the Christian’s labor in working out his salvation to completion is not a solitary affair. **Phil. 2:13** teaches that God Himself works alongside those who earnestly work out their salvation.

This truth connects with something Paul said earlier in the epistle. In **Phil. 1:6**, Paul expressed confidence that *“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* Here, as is the case in **Phil. 2:13**, the emphasis rests upon God’s work in the believer. God begins the work of salvation and He brings it to its final conclusion. This interpretation is consistent with how the scriptures repeatedly present God as both the initiator and finisher of our salvation. Jesus said in **John 6:44**, *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”* This passage is frequently appealed to in support of the Calvinistic doctrine of “Irresistible Grace.” However, despite Calvinism’s abuse and distortion of this text, it must not be denied that God the Father truly is the initiator of our salvation. He draws people to Himself. He does not do so miraculously nor does He do so against anyone’s free will – God draws people to Himself through the gospel (**2 Thess. 2:14; Acts 2:39**). Therefore, God is the initiator of our salvation.

Likewise, the scriptures affirm that God is the finisher of our salvation. **Heb. 12:2** explicitly describes Christ (God the Son) as *“the author and finisher of our faith.”* Again, this truth in no way requires the conclusion that salvation is forced upon unwilling individuals or that God selectively chooses certain individuals for salvation. Rather, all of these passages harmonized together demonstrate that salvation from beginning to end involves God’s gracious work in harmony with man’s work. For this reason, **Phil. 1:6** should be understood as referring to God’s work in salvation itself, not merely to the Philippians’ financial support or fellowship with Paul, as many brethren contend. No, Paul’s point is that **God** (not the Philippians) began the work of salvation “in” the Philippians, and **He** (not

the Philippians) would “complete” that work at the day of judgment.

Returning to **Phil. 2:13**, we see very similar language as in **Phil. 1:6**. Paul emphasizes that God works “in” believers, specifically in those who are diligently working out their salvation (**v.12**). While it is undoubtedly true that God works for His people (**Rom. 8:28**), the emphasis here is not on God working for the believer but “in” the believer.

In the context, Paul does not explain exactly how God works “in” the believer; he only reveals why God works in the believer: to shape our will and actions in accordance with His good pleasure. The impetus is on the reader to harmonize other passages to form a conclusion as to precisely how God works in the believer who is actively working out his salvation. Thankfully, other passages shed light on this divine assistance.



Most brethren assume that Paul is speaking about the indwelling of the word of God and the believer permitting the word of God to work in himself. While **1 Thess. 2:13** does, indeed, teach that *“the word of God effectively works in those who believe,”* good Bible students will observe that **Phil. 2:13** does not state that *“the word of God”* works in the believer. No, the text says “**God**” works in the believer. **Let’s allow the text to say what the text says!**

To reduce Paul's statement in **Phil. 2:13** to the believer's obedience to scripture is to completely reverse and misunderstand who is the subject of the verse. In **Phil. 2:12**, the believer is the subject; he is the one working. However, in **Phil. 2:13**, God is the subject; He is the one working. That is what the actual words on the page say, brethren. One can look at translation after translation and the fact remains that **God** is the worker of **Phil. 2:13**, not man. That means either God the Father is personally at work in His people, or the Spirit who dwells representatively in believers on God's behalf (**1 John 3:24**) is personally at work within us (**Acts 5:32; Gal. 4:6; etc.**). The latter interpretation matches what Paul prayed for in **Eph. 3:16**. There, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be "*strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.*" I want you to notice, my friends, that Paul did not pray that his brethren would find strength through the written word of God (which is, no doubt, a source of strength for the believer [**Acts 20:32**]). Instead, he prayed that God would strengthen these believers via His Holy Spirit who dwelled personally in them (**Eph. 1:13-15, 2:22**). Again, we must note that this stands in contrast to Calvinistic "Irresistible Grace." God strengthens and aids His people through the Spirit, but He never overrides one's will. Instead, He fortifies the wills of those who seek to obey Him (**Heb. 11:6**). The Spirit of God provides inner strength "*both to will and to do for His good pleasure,*" aiding the believer in the endeavor of working out his salvation.

God has not abandoned believers to struggle alone as we work out our salvation. He has given us His Spirit via the word to instruct us as to how we should work out our salvation (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**), but He has also given us His Spirit via a personal indwelling to strengthen our resolve along the way. As

one paraphrase aptly puts it, "*For God is at work in you. He helps you want to do it. And he helps you do what he wants you to do*" (Worldwide English New Testament). The Christian life is a cooperative endeavor: God helps the believer who helps himself.

CONCLUSION

Phil. 2:12-13 presents a powerful portrait of the believer's continual work towards the final saving of his soul. Believers are commanded to personally labor earnestly and reverently in bringing our salvation to completion. Yet, we are assured that we are not alone in this pursuit of heaven. The same God who initiated our salvation and completes our salvation also continues to work within us, strengthening our resolve until the day when His saving work is finally completed. These verses call us to neither complacency nor despair. Instead, they call us to steadfast obedience carried out with reverence, gratitude, and unwavering trust in the God who works in us "*both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*"

SWORD SWIPES

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

Instead of telling someone a filthy or crude joke, tell them about your gratitude for God.

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks" (**Eph. 5:3-4**). (DTS)

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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

Falling From Grace

DICK WARD

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Did you know there are over 2500 warnings in the Bible against man's FALLING FROM GRACE? The false doctrine of "impossibility of apostasy," or "once saved, always saved," or "perseverance of the saints" is popular with several large denominations, but not with God. This Calvinistic teaching, if it were true, would make man merely a machine. Before conversion, man can do nothing to be saved; after conversion, man can do nothing to be lost. The logical result of such unscriptural thinking makes it God's fault (since man can do nothing) if one is lost. Impossible! Unscriptural!

BELIEVE THESE WARNINGS

- *“If thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off” (1 Chron. 28:9).*
- *“But if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you” (2 Chron. 15:2).*
- *“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).*
- *“When I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27).*
- *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12).*
- *“For it is impossible ... if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance” (Heb. 6:4-6).*
- *“Christ is become of none effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).*

These are but a few of the hundreds of warnings, scriptural warnings, against falling from grace.

Notice the Bible says, *“Whosoever of you are justified by the law; YE ARE FALLEN FROM GRACE,”* but man says, *“YE CANNOT FALL FROM GRACE!”* Now, which do you believe? Surely, all of us must take God's truth over the creeds and false doctrines of men. The choice is up to you, but the consequences of the wrong choice are severe.

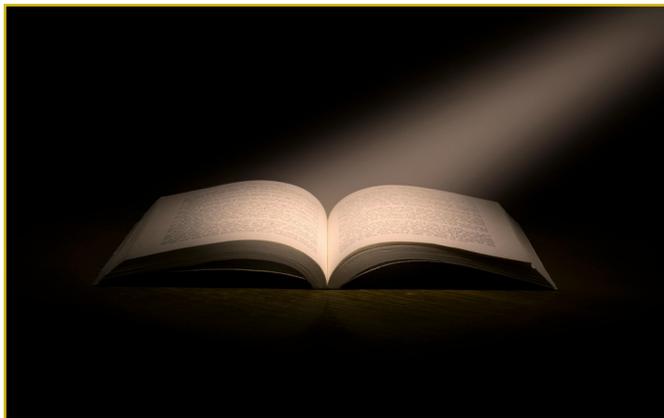
THE EXAMPLE OF SIMON

The example of Simon the sorcerer should convince any Bible believer that a child of God can so sin as to be lost. Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us, *“Then Simon himself BELIEVED also ... he was BAPTIZED ... and he CONTINUED with Philip” (Acts 8:13).* How strained one is to argue with Simon (he believes, is baptized, and continues) was not really converted in the first place. Such reasoning (?) shows the weakness of this false teaching.

Simon was guilty of sin (v.18-20) and Peter, the inspired apostle, said to him, *“Thy money PERISH WITH THEE” (v.20).* This erring, baptized believer was going to *“PERISH”* if he did not repent and pray (v.22).

CONCLUSION

Friends, a child of God can be cut off from Christ by sin. A Christian can fall from grace and be lost!



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