

# The Whole Counsel of God

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[www.thegoodnewsofgod.org](http://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 SEP 2025

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

As we begin our third volume and, thus, third year publishing this journal, we continue to appreciate the encouragement of the readers and give all the glory to God for the blessings He showers upon us.

In this month's edition of the journal, we have included multiple articles addressing various aspects of obedience and how we should approach the scriptures. Questions raised by the articles include:



- Why do we obey God? Do we obey Him because we are commanded to or because we desire to do so? Is there any overlap between the two?
- Is your obedience sincere or simply for show?
- What is your attitude when you approach the scriptures?
- Why are some aspects of scripture difficult to understand? Why wouldn't God make everything easy to understand and, therefore, easier to obey?
- How do we react when we disagree with brethren on a particular scripture?

We pray that all will seriously consider these questions.

Other articles included in this edition of the journal address topics such as sarcasm, bankruptcy, and the importance of debating/defending the truth of the gospel. It is our earnest desire that all of the information presented in this publication will be of great spiritual benefit to all who read it.

As always, if you disagree with any information presented in this publication, please do not hesitate to contact me via the method described in the *Table of Contents*. You may even write a rebuttal to whatever you disagree with that, Lord willing, we will publish in the next edition of *The Whole Counsel of God*.

May God continue to bless us all as we strive to serve Him day-by-day.

(DTS)

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

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

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

For previous editions of *The Whole Counsel of God*, visit [www.thegoodnewsofgod.org](http://www.thegoodnewsofgod.org).



# The Obedience Dilemma

JARED HAGAN | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

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There is a dilemma that I occasionally run across in the church. Do we obey God to be saved or are we saved and as a result we obey God (out of gratitude and love and a desire to be pleasing to God)? I've heard preachers argue one side or the other and rebuke those holding the opposing viewpoints. Which view do you think is correct?

I used to take art classes in school. We were given assignments and I had to do them to get a good grade. So, I did my homework in order to pass and not get in trouble with my parents (who always expected me to come home with a good report card). I did it because I had to. But do you know why I took the art classes? Because I liked drawing. In fact, I liked drawing even when I wasn't in art class or doing homework. When in my other classes (like English, history, or math), during boring lectures my notes would be surrounded by doodles and drawings. These decorations were not assignments. I didn't do them because I had to, but because I liked drawing more than I liked taking notes. If art was a spiritually important act, which one of those behaviors would have been correct?

Should we do art for the grade or because we enjoy making art? Which one would have showed my passion for drawing? Which one would have helped me gain experience and practice to improve my skills? **I say, why choose between the two?** The same thing goes with our original dilemma. Should we obey to be saved or do we obey because we have been saved? The mistake is thinking that there can be only one solution rather than both being true at the same time.

Does our obedience have any impact on our salvation? Like it or not, the answer is yes. Jesus said that only "*he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter*" the kingdom of heaven (**Matt. 7:21**). We are also told that God will deal out retribution to those "*who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*" (**2 Thess. 1:8**). While we will never live in perfect obedience, nonetheless, walking in the Light is necessary for us to have a relationship with God (**1 John 1:5-7** – notice that walking in the Light leads to a cleansing from Jesus rather than a salvation by works). Should we obey God more because we are saved? Absolutely. The fact that God has forgiven us should cause us to "*excel still more*" (**1 Thess. 4:1**). We should want to do what is right out of gratitude for God's love. The grace of God should lead us to avoiding wickedness and being zealous for good deeds (**Tit. 2:11-14**). We have been bought with a price, therefore we should glorify God in our bodies (**1 Cor. 6:20**). This type of obedience flows from grace already received and it leads to voluntary, passionate, and abundant service. It is good. To pick only one, however, would be incorrect. Neither negates the other. They are both true.

We obey God to be saved by Him, meeting His requirements to receive the amazing grace offered through the sacrifice of His Son. Then, being forgiven of so much, we in turn, love much (**Luke 7:40-43**). Wouldn't it be great if we were careful to do everything God asks of us in order to be saved, then, rather than stopping there, we cheerfully kept obeying with a passion that infiltrated every aspect of our lives?



## “I Just Wear the Clothes”

MIKE JOHNSON | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED SEPT. 2021 IN SEEKING THINGS ABOVE



Many years ago, I was in a part of Tennessee with a rather sizable Amish population, which had resulted in a lot of tourism in the area. While there, I went into a store and noticed all the workers were wearing traditional Amish clothing. At some point, I had a friendly conversation with the owner of the business, who wore the same type of attire as the others. I do not remember what prompted this admission, but I will never forget what he revealed as we talked. He said, “I’m not really Amish; I just wear the clothing – it’s good for business.” I can understand why he wore what he did, but I was still taken back upon learning that his garb was just a costume!

Thinking about this story over the years, I have concluded that some Christians are like this business owner as they only play a role. The Bible describes such people as hypocrites, who Jesus extensively condemned during his earthly ministry. The Greek word translated “hypocrisy” originally referred to playing a character in a Greek drama. The actor, usually wearing a mask, would pretend to be someone other than himself. The Biblical use of the term also involves the idea of people pretending to be someone they are not. They wear the right “clothing,” i.e., they

give the appearance of being faithful, devoted Christians. Outwardly, they are religious, but inwardly insincere and unrighteous. Consider some ways people can be hypocritical today.

### GOOD ACTS FOR BAD REASONS

Obedience to God for the wrong reason is unacceptable. Consider three areas in which this can happen.

#### *Charitable Deeds*

**Matt. 6:1-4** says, “*Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.*” He says to not “sound a trumpet” when you do a charitable deed, i.e., do not draw attention to yourself. If we do that, we have already received our reward, which is the applause of others, and we will not receive a reward from God. When we perform a charitable deed, our left hand should not know what our right hand is doing. This expression is not to be taken literally, as our hands do not know anything. With this expression, Jesus continues to show that helping others is not to be done for show. If we do this, we have “no reward” from God. Doing good deeds is proper; doing them to be seen by others makes us hypocrites.

### **Prayer**

Hypocrisy can happen with prayer. In **Matt. 6:5-6**, Jesus stated, *“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”* From what is understood, many Jews prayed just when there was a large crowd, such as at a busy intersection or another public place. Prayer is great, and Jesus is not condemning it. Instead, He criticizes praying for the wrong motives, i.e., praying to be seen by men. Those who pray with this motive have already received their reward – praise from others.

### **Fasting**

In **Matt. 6:16-18**, Jesus taught, *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”* It seems that people wanted to look like they had been fasting and doing so for a long time. They wanted to look disheveled and might even put ashes on their face for effect. Then, when asked what was wrong, they could tell others about having fasted. Jesus said this was not the way to do things as the only person that mattered knowing what they had been doing was God.

Today, we must make sure our motives for obedience are right. Obedience to God is not for show. Following God for the wrong reasons makes us hypocrites. Others may find out about the good we have done, but that is not why we are doing these things. It only matters that God knows about it.

### **JUDGING OTHERS WITH A DIFFERENT STANDARD**

**Matt. 7:1-5** is a very well-known passage. Here Jesus taught, *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”* To begin with, consider what this passage is not saying. Some feel it means that one person should never tell another they are guilty of sin, i.e., any kind of rebuke or reproof is wrong. According to some, if we tell people they are wrong, we are guilty of judging, which Jesus here condemns. However, many passages elsewhere tell us that Christians are to go and correct the erring so they can be saved (**Gal. 6:1; James 5:18-19; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; etc.**). Judging would also be required to obey what **v.6** says about not giving what is holy to “dogs” or “pearls” to swine. Also, judging would be necessary for determining who is a false prophet, as we are told to do in **v.15**. Jesus said later, *“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”* (**John 7:24**). This verse shows us there is an incorrect way and a correct way to judge.

What kind of judgment is under consideration here? He is speaking of hypocritical judging. A person may have a “*plank*” in his eye, a great fault, i.e., something easy to see. Another may have a “*speck*,” which would involve something small and very difficult to see. The verses picture the person with the plank trying to remove a speck from the other person’s eye. A person, for example, rebukes someone for a sin he is practicing himself, even to a greater degree, or it could involve a person being guilty of a sin, which has a smaller impact on others than the one he is practicing. Both sins are serious – both the plank and the speck need to be removed.

### PRETENDING OUTWARD PURITY

While denouncing the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His day, Jesus used two metaphors in **Matt. 23:25-28**: “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*” Imagine getting a bowl out of the cabinet and quickly putting food into it without looking close. When you are almost finished, you notice that the bowl is filthy. Also, tombs might be beautiful on the outside but, in reality, they are places where human remains lie. These Pharisees were like the outside of the dish and tomb. Outwardly, they exuded purity; inwardly, they were full

of corruption and sin. They pretended to be righteous, but they were hypocrites.

Outward appearance needs to match our actual character. We should not praise God on Sunday but curse man on Monday. We should not sing, “Have Thy Own Way Lord,” on Sunday, but then let the world have its way throughout the week. We should not sing, “I Want to Be a Soul Winner for Jesus Everyday,” at the assembly but never mention Him to others outside the meeting house.

The following riddle is generally attributed to Abraham Lincoln. “How many legs does a dog have if you call its tail a leg? Four. Saying that a tail is a leg doesn’t make it a leg.” Similarly, calling people Christians does not make them one.

### CONCLUSION

Other forms of hypocrisy might be cited (**Matt. 15:6-9**). However, hypocrisy, regardless of what form it takes, must be avoided. Sadly, many people practice what is sometimes identified as a “church building religion,” which is a religion only practiced within the four walls of the building. Christians assemble to receive encouragement and teaching (**Heb. 10:24-25**). However, it is necessary to go out and practice what is learned (**James 1:21-22**). It might be stated, “The person who is not a Christian everywhere is not a Christian anywhere.”

Jesus frequently condemned hypocrites. We should make sure that we do not fall into that category. We must not simply put on the “clothes” of Christianity or merely wear a “mask” of righteousness. Many years ago, there was a sign on a wall in the barber-shop where I got my hair cut. It said, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” How would you answer this question?



# Sarcasm

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The word “sarcasm” has an interesting root. It comes from the Greek work “sarkasmos” which literally meant “to tear flesh” (Webster’s Seventh Collegiate Dictionary). Sarcasm seems to be exactly what Paul is warning against in **Gal. 5:15** when he says, “*But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another.*” One paraphrase of this is, “*But if instead of showing love among yourselves you are always critical and catty, watch out! Beware of ruining each other*” (**Gal. 5:15, TLB**).

The use of “cutting, hostile or contemptuous remarks” is sarcasm. When such remarks flow from the mouths of Christians speaking of other Christians, it is sinful! Is this ever done? Sadly, yes. Congregations which practice what the Scriptures teach concerning church cooperation, benevolence, and evangelism are contemptuously referred to as “anti.” Preachers and elders who attempt to follow God’s instructions concerning reproof and discipline are ridiculed as “power hungry popes.” Women of conviction who wear a covering in worship are accused of binding a “religious garb.” Christians who believe that their love for Christ obligates them to carefully keep His commandments are branded as “legalists” bent on judging those who “chew their gum on the wrong side of the mouth.” Sincere beliefs and practices of fellow Christians are laughed at and scorned.

Too often, when we should “*be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another*” (**Rom. 12:10**), we give neither love nor honor. We give cuts and sarcasm. When we should be “*striving to keep the unity of the*

*Spirit in the bond of peace*” (**Eph. 4:3**), we are making every effort to maintain a factious spirit with the axe of spite. Paul commanded, “*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers*” (**Eph. 4:29**). If this verse means anything, it means that only edifying words should come out of the mouths of Christians. Edifying words are words that make others stronger. Edifying words may include admonitions with considerable bite to them. When fault is pointed out and corrected, Jesus Himself used some very strong language (**cf. Matt. 23**), but edifying words will not include needless sarcasm.

The wise man wrote, “*There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes good health*” (**Prov. 12:18**). May God grant us the wisdom to speak only those words which promote the health of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## SWORD SWIPES

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

**Whenever Satan extends an invitation to us, God does too.**

**“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).**

**(DTS)**



# Bankruptcy

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At the time of writing, there has been much conversation regarding President Trump absolving the debts of a certain celebrity family who were imprisoned for tax evasion and later filed bankruptcy to avoid paying their debts. The Bible teaches that a person sins if he does not pay back his debts: *“Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:7-8)*. The Psalmist said, *“The wicked borrows and does not repay, But the righteous shows mercy and gives” (Psalm 37:21)*. Therefore, just because the government makes it legal for a person to not pay back their debts (file bankruptcy or insolvency), or even goes so far as to pardon a person who owes millions of dollars, this does not mean the person has been cleared of his debt in the eyes of God.

Some (even some Christians I have encountered recently) argue that bankruptcy is simply a legal avenue people can take advantage of if they ever fall on hard times. Yet, just because the government legalizes a prac-

tice does not mean that practice is authorized by God. For example, abortion, unscriptural divorces/marriages/remarriages, buying/selling/consuming alcohol, etc. are all legalized by the United States government, but God’s holy book still says a person sins when they engage in any of those practices. Likewise, bankruptcy (a legal means by which a person can avoid fully paying back a debt) does not violate civil law. Yet, not repaying a debt violates God’s divine law in **Rom. 13:7-8**.

Some (even some Christians I have encountered recently) also argue that we must examine the motive of someone who files bankruptcy to determine whether or not the person truly committed sin or not. However, this conclusion not only forces man to judge the hearts of others (something we are incapable of doing [1 Sam. 16:7]), but it also overlooks how the very definition of this legal avenue provides clear evidence as to what is taking place whenever a person files for bankruptcy. Cara O’Neill (Attorney, University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law) explains, “Bankruptcy is a safety net that helps individuals, families, and businesses get back on their feet financially when they are overwhelmed by debt. For many, filing bankruptcy is a natural step after an unexpected event like a job loss, illness, or divorce. Bankruptcy relieves the stress associated with medical bills, foreclosure, credit card balances, and more ... Bankruptcy works by ‘voiding’ or breaking the contracts between you and your bankruptcy creditors, freeing you from the responsibility of paying your bills” (Nolo’s Legal Encyclopedia,

2025). Filing bankruptcy and, thus, voiding or breaking contracts between oneself and his creditor violates New Testament commands requiring us to keep our commitments (**Matt. 5:33-37, Eph. 4:25; etc.**). Furthermore, the word of God tells us the underlying problem with a person who files bankruptcy. Again, the psalmist said, *“The wicked borrows and does not repay”* (**Psalm 37:21a**). One who does not pay back a debt is defined in scripture as a *“wicked”* person.

Some (even some Christians I have encountered recently) argue that unplanned events, such as the ones mentioned by Mrs. O’Neill (job loss, illness, divorce, etc.), can render a person unable to pay a debt. Since when do emotional stories determine the truth? Emotional stories did not change the truth in Jesus’s day (**Matt. 23:23-32**), and they do not change the truth for us today, whether on baptism, divorce and remarriage, bankruptcy, or any other subject. The truth will still be the truth even after our hearts are affected by a person’s emotional story which greatly affects him financially. The command in **Rom. 13:7-8** is absolute.

If a Christian falls on hard times, there are many scriptural ways for that Christian to obtain money to pay back his debt. He can work (**Eph. 4:28**), receive financial assistance from individuals who feel compelled to aid him (**Gal. 6:10, 2:10**), or receive financial aid from local churches (**Acts 4:33-35; Acts 6:1; Acts 11:26-30; 2 Cor. 8:1-4, 9:1,12; etc.**). Choosing not to pay back the debt, however, is not a scriptural option based on the truth presented in **Rom. 13:7-8**. The text clearly states that it is not just important for Christians to pay what is due to the government (taxes); we must also *“render therefore to all their due.”* If we owe someone or some business money and we do not pay them back, we commit sin.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

**Did you know it wasn’t the Baptist denominations but the Holy Spirit who said that God is full of grace and mercy (Heb. 4:16)?**

**Did you know it wasn’t an unmarried male chauvinist / misogynist but the Holy Spirit who said a woman isn’t permitted to teach over a man and not permitted to speak in church (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 14:34-35)?**

**Did you know it wasn’t the Puritans or Muslims but the Holy Spirit who said a woman must wear an artificial head covering when she prays or prophesies (1 Cor. 11:2-16)?**

**Did you know it wasn’t the Holiness denominations but the Holy Spirit who said a woman should have long hair (1 Cor. 11:15)?**

**Did you know it wasn’t the Calvinist denominations but the Holy Spirit who said Jesus bore our sins on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24; Heb. 9:28; Isa. 53:6)?**

**Did you know it wasn’t the Catholic Church but the Holy Spirit who said there is an intermediary place where the soul resides after death to await the final judgment (Luke 16:19-31)?**

**Did you know it wasn’t the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses but the Holy Spirit who said God’s people must be diligent in personal evangelism (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 8:1-4)?** (DTS)

# Can We Force Discipleship?

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Christians desire to see people do what is right. We look at a society that has lost its way and we wonder, with echoes of Habakkuk, how long this will continue before God acts in righteous judgment. We want to see people come to Jesus. Yet if we lose patience and forget what it means to let our lights shine, we might cross a line that runs counter to the Lord's will. We may be so eager to persuade that we end up going too far by manipulating, coercing, and supporting efforts to force people into biblical discipleship.

For example, Christianity was never meant to be a state religion. The Lord did not intend for Christians to lord it over others, take over a political state, or engage in physical fighting to coerce and control others. If those in positions of power actually became Christians (as biblically defined), then praise God! However, never do we find Christ or the apostles endorsing a movement that forced others into discipleship.

Shortly after Peter attempted to kill a servant of the High Priest (and got his ear), Jesus indicated that violence in His defense would not be acceptable. Later, Jesus told

Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world"* (**John 18:36**). If anyone could have taken over and forced a religion on others, it was Jesus. Yet He expressly said that's not what would happen. The kingdom of God does not spread by force (**Matt. 11:11-12**). Instead, the nations submitting to Him would *"beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore"* (**Isa .2:4**). If we try to spread the kingdom through physical force and political power, then we are spreading the wrong kingdom.

To force the kingdom of God on others would require physical power to lord it over others against their will. Jesus expressly forbids this among His disciples. When His disciples fought with one another, Jesus told them, *"You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (**Mark 10:42-45**).

If we make Christianity into some sort of statist religion, then we are requiring some to be lords over others, exercising authority over others, and violating the point Jesus made. Even within local churches,

those serving as elders are not to lord it over those in their charge (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Instead of forcing or bending others to our will, we are to serve, be examples, and let our lights shine in a dark world (Matt. 5:13-14; Phil. 2:13-14).

Christians should respect free will because God appeals to the free will actions of others to do His will. While we try to persuade others and plead with them to be reconciled to God, God still leaves it up to people to make their choices and serve Him freely (see 2 Cor. 5:11-21; Josh. 24:14-15). Our job is to facilitate this by making the plea and living in a way that points people to Jesus. We are to warn of the consequences of turning from light and life (to darkness and death), but it is not ours to threaten or harm anyone who chooses to walk away from it (2 Cor 10:3-5). Further, while there are consequences to congregational discipline, never is there the threat of personal harm or coercion.

While Christians ought to do what they can in culture to hold up the good, the true, and beautiful (which can include voting, etc.), they are not at liberty to turn the way of Christ into a coercive, political machine that runs rough-shod over the free will of others. We are to try to persuade, to be sure (2 Cor 5:11). We make our arguments, we give the biblical warnings, we live Christ by example, and we love our neighbors as ourselves. However, we do not lord it over others. We are servants, like Christ, and we may wind up being persecuted, like Christ, but we should never force or manipulate others to be Christians.

Christians need to see the importance of being the examples we have been called to be. When people turn from the gospel message, pray for them. If we find ways to serve,

then serve them. If doors are opened, then pray, as Paul, to speak clearly as we ought to speak, and to do so with grace (Col. 4:2-6). Speak boldly for Jesus, hold out His word, and let that message be the prod that gets their attention inviting them to be reconciled with God: *“We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God”* (2 Cor. 5:20).

## **MYTH BUSTERS**

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

**Having faith in God does not mean that bad things will not happen, but having faith in God does ensure that when bad things do happen you will not face them alone.**

**The Christian can take comfort in knowing that in the midst of trial, sickness, or even death God is ever-present and continually working all things for our good and for His glory:**

- ***“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations”*** (Deut. 7:9).
- ***“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”*** (Rom. 8:28).

**\*Adapted\* (Kyle Ellison | Alabama, United States, July 2025)**



## Stones to Bread Revisited

JOHN GIBSON | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

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*“But He answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”* Most readers will recognize these words from **Matt. 4:4** as those spoken by Jesus when confronted by Satan in the wilderness and challenged to prove that He was the Son of God by turning the stones into bread. While I can’t imagine a Christian questioning Jesus’ answer, based on things I’m reading and hearing from some of my brethren, I’m convinced that if this had been said or written by a gospel preacher today it would have been criticized in one or more of the following ways:

“I noticed you quoted from the Septuagint, but are you sure it translated the Hebrew correctly here? The Septuagint is not a bad translation, but a lot has been learned about Hebrew in the last 250 years. Unless you have done sufficient research on the original language, I would be hesitant to rely too heavily on a translation that old.”

“Have you ever stopped to think that you are reading Deuteronomy as a 1st-century inhabitant of Galilee when these words were spoken to a people who had been wandering in the Sinai wilderness for 40 years? To people living in a barren land bread may have had a different meaning.”

“While everyone recognizes there are portions of the Scripture that contain Law, in **Deut. 8** Moses is telling a story, and it’s a perversion of the original intent to go over a narrative in that manner and

pick commandments from it that you turn into law. In those sections we simply need to read the story and learn to be more like Moses and other faithful men and women who loved the Lord their God.”

“While your interpretation of **Deut. 8:4** has been the prevailing one taught in the stricter synagogues for some time, we must be willing to challenge orthodoxy and not be trapped in a traditional mindset.”

“Why must you come across as so rigid in your approach to questions like this? I can understand why you may not be comfortable with turning stones to bread, and if that’s the case, then don’t do it. But why bind your interpretation on everyone else?”

Lest anyone misunderstand, I believe studying the original languages of Scripture, viz. Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, can be very helpful and would recommend such study to anyone who has the time and opportunity. However, when New Testament speakers and writers quoted from the Old Testament, more often than not, they relied on the Septuagint (a Greek translation begun ca. 280 B.C.), rather than cite the “original Hebrew.” Today, we have multiple translations done by large committees of the best Hebrew and Greek scholars available, so let’s be careful not to imply that “real” knowledge of the Scriptures is only for those who have studied the original languages.

Anyone who has heard me teach or preach knows I put great emphasis on the context of passages. We must know who is

speaking, to whom, under what circumstances, etc., and I appreciate those who call attention to the error of making passages mean something the writer never intended. However, some carry the importance of “historical context” to such an extreme that we are left with one of two ideas. Listening to some would leave you convinced that we can never know the truth on a subject because we can never properly relate to their circumstances. This goes against everything the New Testament says about truth and our ability to know and understand it (**John 8:31-32; Eph. 3:3-5; etc.**). The second option is that we become dependent upon the elite among us who must enlighten us on these matters. Aren’t both points refuted when Paul wrote to the predominantly Gentile Corinthian church and, without a long and extensive course in understanding the ancient Hebrew culture, made reference to the Passover and other Old Testament occurrences in **1 Cor. 5** and **1 Cor. 10**? If Macedonian Gentiles could relate to Middle Eastern Jewish history, is there any reason we can’t do the same with both the Old and the New Testaments? Context does matter, but it is neither unknowable nor the exclusive property of the elites.

In recent years, I have read a lot about the narrative portions of Scripture and how we must not make the mistake of reading them as law, or going through them expecting to find laws. However, if Jesus looked to **Psalm 82:6**, a piece of poetry, and called it “law,” “*the word of God*” and “*the Scripture*,” perhaps we should not be so quick to decide that narrative can’t contain God’s commandments. Since James used the story of Rahab and the spies to teach a lesson on faith and works, shouldn’t we seek to discern the will of God in all of Scripture (see **Matt. 7:21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17**)?

Defenders of traditionalism and so-called orthodoxy will not find a friend in me; I believe very strongly that we always need to maintain the spirit of an open-minded quest for truth (**Acts 17:10-11**). However, the problem I see is that far too many are no longer searching for truth as something attainable. They question everything anyone before them has believed; they denounce as mere traditionalism everything practiced and taught by those who have gone before them, yet they offer no truth in exchange. While Jesus frequently attacked the traditional interpretations of the scribes and Pharisees, in return He offered a “*but I say to you.*” Our Lord promised that truth could be known (**John 8:32**), and we need to be committed to knowing and practicing it. Let’s remember that truth is determined by God (**John 17:17**) and is neither validated nor invalidated by the number of people before us who have believed it.

May we all earnestly long for God’s word (**1 Pet. 2:1-3**) and grow in our ability to handle it properly, thus discerning right and wrong and being able to teach others (**Heb. 5:12-14**). May God help us all to develop the meekness and honesty of application spoken of in **James 1:21-25**: “*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*”

## Understanding the Truth is Not Always Easy

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**2 Pet. 3:15-16** reads, “*Count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*” It can be easy to become discouraged when we come across passages that seemingly contradict other Bible passages or are difficult to understand. However, during these times of confusion, we must remember that God sometimes requires extra effort on our part to understand His word.

Jesus told His apostles, “*To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that ‘they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven’*” (**Mark 4:11-12**). Similarly, **Matt. 13:13-15** records Jesus saying, “*This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case*

*the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’*”

These passages demonstrate how God can intentionally make learning the truth difficult (though still understandable [**see John 8:32; 2 Tim. 3:16**]) because He wants us to love Him enough to show diligence in study. As result, we must spend much time and effort studying the scriptures. Only then will we be able to understand things that seem difficult or contradictory (**see Josh. 1:8; Psalm 119:9-11; 2 Tim. 2:15**). Once we determine what God expects from us, we must then be willing to accept and obey what is written (**John 13:17**). God demands a full commitment from those seeking to be His children (**Prov. 3:5-8, 16:3; Matt. 22:37; etc.**); a half-hearted commitment will never be enough to help us us learn, understand, and obey the truth (**Psalm 119:10**).

We would all do well to follow the example of the Bereans: “*Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so*” (**Acts 17:11**). Since God purposefully designed His word to require effort on our parts in order for us to understand what is written, we must “*Do [our] best to present [ourselves] to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed*” (**2 Tim. 2:15**). The Bible is not always easy to understand, so let’s make sure we are putting in our best effort to rightly divide the scriptures so we will not be “*ashamed*” when we stand before God in judgment.

## “My Flesh is Food ... and My Blood is Drink”

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The following is recorded in **John 6:53-58**: “*Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.’*” From time to time, brethren read this text at the Lord’s Table, implying that this reference to eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood is about the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine meant to memorialize His body and blood. While it is true that, in the Lord’s Supper, the unleavened bread represents the body of Jesus and the fruit of the vine represents His blood (**Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25**), problems arise in conflating this passage with any reference to that communion.

John’s inspired account of the “last supper” includes many details Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul omitted, but he left it to them to record the institution of the Lord’s Supper. John simply did not write about it, which is unsurprising as his book has a noticeably different approach than the others do, covering the life and death of the Messiah.

What Jesus said in the text under consideration was spoken a full year before He established the Lord’s Supper. The events leading up to the remarks in question are prefaced with the statement that “*the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near*” (**John 6:4**). The next time Jesus would celebrate the Passover (**John 11:55**) was the night Judas betrayed Him and Peter denied Him (**John 13:18-38**), which was the same Passover when He taught the disciples to break bread and drink the cup in His memory (**Mark 14:12-31**). Thus, the passage in which Jesus identified Himself as the true manna is not in the same context as the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

The context began with Jesus miraculously feeding a multitude of five thousand men, not counting women and children, with five loaves and two fish (**John 6:5-14**). The next day, the crowd pursued Him and He rebuked them because their only motivation was to again be fed (**v.22-27**). They persisted, bringing up the manna by which Israel was fed in the wilderness with the implication Jesus was somehow obligated to feed them bread every day (**v.30-31**). It is this point at which the Lord identified Himself as One to be consumed (**v.32-34**), saying, “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst*” (**v.35**). Christ emphasized an eating which satisfies spiritual, rather than physical, need, one which results in never hungering or thirsting. This is what He meant when He preached, much earlier, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for*



*they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).* That verse is not about the Lord’s Supper either.

Nothing in the context points the reader to a regular observance whereby Christ or His sacrifice on behalf of mankind is to be remembered. Rather, the lesson is that Christ Himself is One who nourishes like no food can. Thus, the emphasis is on belief: *“He who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe” (v.35-36); “Everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life” (v.40); and “He who believes in Me has everlasting life” (v.47).* It is because believing in Jesus is the message and the outcome is eternal life.

The Lord’s Supper reminds Christians of Christ’s death and allows them to proclaim it, but it does not impart everlasting life. However, the food and drink that Jesus is does convey that heavenly blessing: *“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (v.49-51).*

Throughout the chapter, Jesus illustratively communicated that He sustains life, spiritual life, and eternal life. Every soul must feed on Him or die. Feeding is a figurative reference to faith. It is an important message, but it must be reserved to its own context.

*“Oh, taste and see that Jehovah is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Psalm 34:8).*

## THINK ON THIS

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

Years ago, arguments in Bible studies at church were more common than today. These arguments were sometimes ugly. People didn’t always behave as they should. Nevertheless, heated discussions would often come up, and that was not always a bad thing. Why I say that is because many of these arguments arose out of deep concern brethren had for the truth.

Arguments are not always a bad thing. When a team is passionate about winning, practice can get intense. When business partners are passionate about achieving excellence, disagreements can be heated. When Bible students are sincerely concerned about truth, it can (and will necessarily) lead to vigorous debate. However, there are some rules we should follow when a disagreement arises in Bible study:

- (1) Keep an open mind. You may learn something. Listen and try to understand where the other side is coming from.
- (2) Keep self out of it. Don’t make it personal. Your primary concern is not winning the argument. You want the truth. That’s all.
- (3) When the debate is over shake hands. Engage the opposition after the study and make sure there are no hard feelings (Eph. 4:3).

(David Maxson | Alabama, United States, Apr. 2025)

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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

### **Honorable Controversy**

**CHARLES G. MAPLES, SR.**

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*“What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Cor. 6:14-16).*

As long as the world shall stand, there will be no rest for Satan! And, there is no place for rest for “Soldiers of Christ.” There will always be unrighteousness, ungodliness, and evil! And, we pray that there shall always be at least a “remnant” who will refuse to “bow the knee to Baal” (**Rom. 11:4-5; 1 Kings 9:18**) These things being true, there will always be CONTROVERSY.

The teaching of error and false doctrine, because of ignorance of or lack of love and respect for Truth, demands that we defend it (**Phil. 1:17**). The Psalmist wrote, “Through thy precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way” (**Psalms 119:104**). Abuse of or misuse of Truth on the part of one, moves those who have reverence

for Truth to “earnestly contend” for it (**Jude 3**). In defining “contend,” Mr. Webster says it is “to strive in opposition or rivalry; to compete. To maintain or assert; argue.” He defines “defend” as, “To repel danger or harm from; to protect; to maintain against force or argument.” Therefore, as long as men do not come to agreement on Truth or error, there will be CONTROVERSY!

Controversy is an uncertain instrument. In one’s efforts to defend the Truth in controversy, he might either do Truth a great amount of good, or he may do a great amount of damage depending upon the motivation for engaging in, preparation for, and the spirit of such contention. Mr. Webster defines “controversy” as, “A discussion of a controversial matter, or controversial issue; dispute; quarrel; strife.” Now, when controversy takes on the spirit of “quarrelling” and “strife,” it ceases to be honorable, and Truth might suffer as consequence, but otherwise controversy, debate, and discussion are Truth’s most effective allies. This is HONORABLE CONTROVERSY.

Christ was one of the world’s greatest Controversialists. The hypocritical Jews of His days tried again and again to trap Him with questions, and He didn’t respond with, “You know we shouldn’t argue about religious matters,” but rather with, “It is written,” as with His confrontation with Satan (**Matt. 4:1-11**). If our Lord saw this as a

way of furthering Truth and its cause, then we should surely consider such as HONORABLE CONTROVERSY.

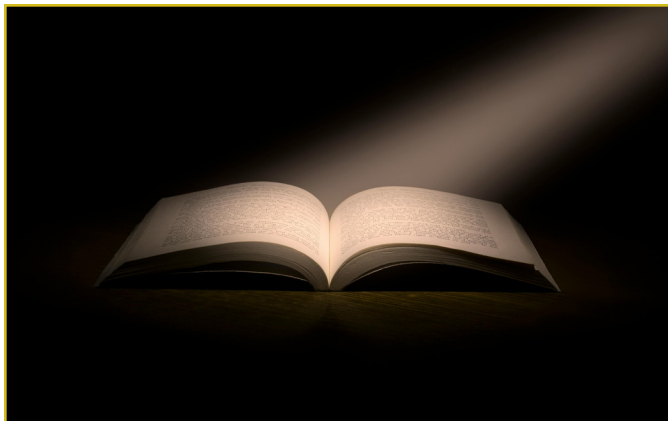
Again, Jude tells us that we should “earnestly contend for the faith” (v.3). We are urged to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The standard by which that proving (“testing,” NKJV) is to be done is the word of God.

John admonishes us to “try the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). According to Rev. 2:2, the church in Ephesus had “tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.” The apostle Paul charged the elders of that church to defend the flock of God against “savage wolves” that would enter in among them (Acts 20:28f). The apostle “practiced what he preached” in that he was “set for the defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:17), and we have record of his doing so, as he “reasoned FROM THE SCRIPTURES” in the Jewish synagogues frequently (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19). In doing that, he “spoke boldly ... disputing and persuading” (Acts 19:8). His defense of Truth had great effect for good, for “he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing FROM THE SCRIPTURES that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:28). In that, he fought “the good fight of faith,” which he urged upon Timothy; and likewise, upon us (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Now, there are among those who oppose public controversy in religion three basic reasons for doing so. One is convenience; convenience is a “city of refuge” (Num. 35) for him who realizes that his teaching can’t stand the scrutiny of Truth. It is therefore convenient for him to be against “arguing in

religion.” Another is the misunderstanding by good people of such passages as Rom. 1:29 and 2 Cor. 12:20. The term “debate” in those Scriptures seems to them to condemn controversy. However, those passages do not have under consideration HONORABLE CONTROVERSY. The word “debate” should be translated “strife,” as in the ASV. This word is derived from a term which means “a disposition to be quarrelsome and contentious, and is an outgrowth of enmity” (W.E. Vine). The third reason for opposition to religious controversy by some is the repulsiveness of DISHONORABLE CONTROVERSY, which they have either heard or heard of. In this, men whose position is weak (known better to them than anyone else) make their appeal not to Truth but to prejudice, emotions, and perversion of Scripture. However, we must not conclude that ALL controversy is wrong because of this abuse of polemics. Those who love the Truth will be careful to PRACTICE it in their defense of it – “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

There are, as there were in Paul’s day, those who “would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7), but those who truly love Truth will be found having their “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ... taking the shield of faith ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God ... standing against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-18). In this, we do not depend upon our own “power,” but seek to be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (v.10), as we “wrestle against ... principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places” (v.12). Such is, indeed, HONORABLE CONTROVERSY.



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