

# February 2018

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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren  
**WHATEVER THINGS** are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely  
are of good report  
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –  
**meditate on these things.**

PHILIPPIANS  
**4:8**

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at [christistheway.com](http://christistheway.com).

"The words of a gossip are like choice morsels as they descend to the innermost parts of the body" (Proverbs 18:8, **International Standard Version**; cf. 26:22). Gossip is spiritual candy. It tastes great. But once you take it in, it becomes part of you, and chokes the life from your heart.

## Question about Revelation Twenty

### Question

I was hoping to ask you a question about Revelation 20 as it pertains to current events. If you are willing, my question for you follows the text. If not, I will not be upset with you. This is not a test for you. I actually am hoping you might be able to enlighten me a little on this particular Scripture.

My thoughts: It appears to me that the events contained herein are in reference to the period of time after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and maybe even after the destruction of Jerusalem. I say that because it speaks of being priests of God and of Christ, which certainly is talking about Christians. And they shall reign with Him a thousand years. At the beginning of that reign, Scripture speaks of Satan being bound a thousand years, but then he must be released for a little while. If God had meant 10 thousand years or more, it seems He would have said, "...bound him for ten thousand years." But, it doesn't say that. It says, "...a thousand years." No one knows exactly when that "thousand year" period of time will end, or ended. I'm inclined to speculate that it has already ended. When? I'm not sure. Perhaps when Darwin began teaching that evolution was true and God was not...and people began to believe him. Or, maybe shortly before work began on nuclear weapons. Either way, if the thousand year period has indeed ended, then all that's left is for us to witness that Gog and Magog are gathering to battle and that they are spreading out

upon the breadth of the earth and will surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city.

Here is a problem. We normally read this and think that Gog and Magog are going up to battle against the saints. What if they are not? What if instead they are going up to battle one another? Well, where does that leave the part about surrounding the saints? Only here: If Gog and Magog are planning to have a nuclear war, then it means that no one on earth will survive. In that sense, the saints have certainly, in a matter of speaking, been surrounded just as surely as if the battle was against them, personally. If the war begins between nuclear powers, it means that all Christians everywhere will die and all work of the church will cease. If it gets to that point where a war is inevitable and the first nuclear missile that will begin the destruction of earth is on the verge of being fired, I believe then that "fire will come down from God out of heaven and devour them", and stop the war before it begins. However, it will also mark the end of the world, but with God bringing it to a close. If He did not stop the war at that precise moment, it would certainly begin and all Christians (and all mankind) everywhere would die.

Today's events: We are today witnessing events all over the earth, where it seems that everyone in government has gone completely insane. I can't imagine things being any worse than they are. If Satan is not now "released for a little while", then how much worse could it be later when he IS released!? I believe he has been released. The United States is setting up missile systems everywhere all over the earth. They are now pointing into Russia from all over the middle east, especially Romania and Poland. The US is also setting up missiles pointing into China from South Korea and Japan. The US is doing their best to start wars with both, which will certainly finish as nuclear. The US is trying to start a war with Iran and threatening them. Israel has gone completely rogue and is threatening everyone everywhere, not to even mention their mass genocide of the Palestinians. The US has convinced many people that they are planning a nuclear "preventive attack" on North Korea in February during the Olympics in South Korea. If that happens, there will be millions of dead people initially, not even counting the millions to follow later. If North Korea succeeds in retaliating against the US, there will be even more. And, there are 25 nuclear power stations in South Korea. Who will manage those and shut them down if nearly everyone in South Korea is also dead?

Mr. Sharp, I know you will think I'm crazy, but I have the same opinion about things as many reputable people. Paul Craig Roberts, former Asst Sec. of Treasury under President Reagan believes as I do. So do Russian expert Stephen Cohen, journalist Finian Cunningham and many others. I don't live in the United States, as I wrote to you earlier. I live in Spain and I've been outside the propaganda umbrella of the US for over 14 years now. Everyone outside the US knows that the government of the US is the most evil government running the most evil empire that the world has ever known. There is a group of people in charge of the government known as "Neocons". They took over the government during the time of President Bush, and they've been calling the shots ever since. They are dead set on, literally, ruling the world. They have convinced themselves that the US can win a nuclear war against Russia and China! And, they appear to be on a course from which they refuse to turn back, or even to deviate. Mr. Sharp, I believe the church is almost completely surrounded even as we speak. No, I'm not crazy. But, it's no secret that we are not far from a full blown nuclear war with Russia and China. President Putin is not a "Hitler" or a "warmonger". I've listened to all his speeches and talks and read a lot about him. He's a good man. Perhaps not a Christian, but a good moral man nevertheless. He's the only reason we have not had a nuclear war so far.

Thanks for listening and, am I wrong about the "surrounding of the camp of the saints"?

#### **Answer**

Thank you for your question. I will do my best to give you a correct answer from the Scriptures. You begin your comments by saying, "I'm inclined to speculate...." Speculation about Scripture is a dangerous practice. "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

The book of Revelation was "signified." (Revelation 1:1) This word means "to indicate by a sign" (William D.

Mounce, **Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**. 1268). It identifies the language of the book as symbolic, figurative.

Often it is physically absurd for the language of Revelation to be literal. John speaks of a "great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads" whose "tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (Revelation 12:3-4). How could a literal seven-headed dragon with a tail that measured billions of light years in length throw literal stars, most of which are millions of times larger than the earth, to the literal earth? No reasonable person can contend this is literal language.

Sometimes a literal application of the book plainly violates clear teaching from other Scripture. John pictures "the Lamb" (a literal lamb?) fighting in carnal warfare (Revelation 17:14; 19:11-16), but Jesus taught that His kingdom is not upheld by armed might (John 18:36). Is Revelation figurative, or does John contradict his own account of Jesus' words?

Revelation is the sole New Testament representative of a class of literature called "apocalyptic." Three Old Testament books fit this category (Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah), and several uninspired books written during the period of silence between Malachi and Matthew are of this genre. Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of national Israel is also apocalyptic (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).

The book itself asserts in seven passages that its prophecies were soon to be fulfilled and the coming of Christ was to take place shortly after it was written (Revelation 1:1, 3; 3:11; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20). The prophecies of the book began to be fulfilled, and in one sense Jesus came, in the very generation to which John wrote.

"Gog and "Magog" are those who surround the camp of the saints (Revelation 20:8). These two terms are found in Ezekiel chapters 37 and 38. There was a "Magog" who was a son of Japheth, one of the sons of Noah (Genesis 10:2; 1 Chronicles 1:5), and "Gog" is "of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal" (Ezekiel 38:2-3). They were to come from the "far north" against Israel (Ezekiel 38:15; 39:2). Invaders, such as Assyria and Babylon, characteristically came from the north against Israel. Ezekiel stated that the Lord had prophesied against Gog and Magog "in the former prophets" (Ezekiel 38:17). But there is no mention of either Gog or Magog by any prophet in the Old Testament books of the prophets except Ezekiel. "Gog" and "Magog" represent all the unbelieving enemies of the people of the Lord of every generation. They surround and persecute the saints, and the Lord will destroy them.

Nor are the "thousand years" and "little while" of Revelation 20:1-7 literal. Christ began to reign after His ascension back to the Father (Daniel 7:13-14; Acts 2:29-31; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9) and will continue to reign until His return (1 Corinthians 15:22-24).

According to Revelation 20:1-7, those who reign with Christ are "the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God" (Revelation 20:4). The ones reigning are the souls of beheaded people. Unless your head has been cut off you're cut out of the thousand years reign, if it is literal.

The thousand years is symbolic of great power, power that is victorious over death. The saints shall be raised to eternal life (1 Peter 1:3-5). The "little while" is small power. All Satan can do is tempt us through His deception and persecution (Ephesians 6:11; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Peter 5:8). Modern political issues are not directly related to the book of Revelation, but the spiritual principles of the book apply to every generation.

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## Vulgarity

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

"Vulgarity draws ban on calling up Cotton." So went the headline of a recent "Arkansas Democrat Gazette"

article. A female critic of Senator Tom Cotton admittedly used obscene language when speaking on the phone to one of the senator's staff. Senator Cotton's office sent her a letter telling her not to communicate with his office anymore.

Not only did the woman admit to using the vulgar language, she defended herself for using it and criticized the senator for forbidding her future communication. "Have I used expletives? Yes,' Lane said, 'I like to think I used them appropriately and to get people's attention.'"

Another Cotton critic, a man, admitted using similar language with the Cotton staff with the same results.

Is there an appropriate use for vulgar language?

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

*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 (Ephesians 5:3-4).*

*Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.*

*For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:34-37).*

My grandmother used a bar of her homemade lye soap to wash out the mouth of any child who used bad language in her house. We need a lot of lye soap today.

No, there is no appropriate use for vulgar language.

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## Ellen G. White

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Although there have been other proponents of observing the Sabbath day in modern times, Ellen G. White is the most prominent, as she is considered the founder of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. A full examination of her work would be the subject of another writing, but there are a few pertinent facts that we should consider.

Ellen White (1827-1915) was a prolific writer. She wrote more than 5,000 articles and 40 books. Seventh-day Adventists believe she was more than a gifted writer; they believe she was appointed by God as a special messenger and prophetess to help prepare people for Christ's second coming. During her life, they believe God gave her approximately 2,000 visions and dreams. As a teenager, she and her family accepted the views presented by William Miller and his associates, who predicted the return of Christ to earth October 22, 1844. This failed prophecy was called the Great Disappointment.

White's writing, traveling and teaching reached a climax in the organization of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in May, 1863. Her most prominent writing was *The Great Controversy*, first published in 1888. In recent years, a problem has risen concerning this, as it has been well documented that this book was not her own, but large portions were copied from J. N. Andrews. Steve Rudd says of this: "The Great Controversy contains the pillars and foundation of Adventist theology. White copied this key doctrine in the Great Controversy from books written by James White. James White copied his books from books written by J. N. Andrews. Thus the ultimate source of Seventh-day Adventist theology is not God inspiring new truths to White, but plagiarizing (copying) J. N. Andrews." (From Rudd's website Bible.ca). Numerous quotes from White and Andrews, when placed side by side, show evidence of copying that cannot be disputed. This is called plagiarism, and is, in fact against the law, as well as against moral

ethics.

There is an effort today to downplay the claim that she was an inspired prophet of God, but a look at the SDA Creed shows the official position of the church:

*"#17 "The gift of Prophecy: One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Support is found in these Bible passages: Joel 2:28,29: Acts 2:14-21: Hebrews 1:1-3: Revelation 12:17: Revelation 19:10."*

With respect to her teaching on observing the Sabbath, we give the following quotes. In "Life Sketches of Ellen G. White," an Adventist publication, they relate her "vision" of the Sabbath day.

*"Elder Bates was resting upon Saturday, the seventh day of the week, and he urged it upon our attention as the true Sabbath. I did not feel its importance, and thought that he erred in dwelling upon the fourth commandment more than upon the other nine. But the Lord gave me a view of the heavenly sanctuary. The temple of God was opened in heaven, and I was shown the ark of God covered with the mercy seat. Two angels stood one at either end of the ark with their wings spread over the mercy seat and their faces turned toward it. This, my accompanying angel informed me, represented all the heavenly hosts looking with reverential awe toward the law of God, which had been written by the finger of God. Jesus raised the cover of the ark, and I beheld the tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. I was amazed as I saw the fourth commandment in the very center of the ten precepts with a soft halo of light encircling it. Said the angel, 'It is the only one of the ten which defines the living God who created the heavens and the earth and all things that are there-in'" (pages 95 and 96).*

From another source, we have:

*"In the ark was the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of stone, which folded together like a book. Jesus opened them, and I saw the Ten Commandments written on them with the finger of God. On one table were Four and on the other six. The four on the first table shone brighter than the other six. But the fourth, the Sabbath commandment, shone above them all; for the Sabbath was set apart to be kept in honor of God's holy name. The holy Sabbath looked glorious, a halo of glory was all around it. I saw that the Sabbath commandment was not nailed to the cross. If it was, the other nine commandments were; and we are at liberty to break them all as well as to break the fourth. I saw that God had not changed the Sabbath, for he never changes. But the pope had changed it from the seventh day to the first day of the week; for he was to change times and laws" ("Early Writings of Ellen G. White." 33).*

Again on page 65 of the same book Mrs. White says, "The pope has changed the day of rest from the seventy to the first day."

There are four problems with Mrs. White's "visions" and work.

(1) She was regarded as a pastor/evangelist. The Bible teaches that pastors (also referred to as elders and bishops) were to be men. "Faithful is the saying, If a man seeketh the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. The bishop therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife..." (1 Timothy 3:1-2a).

(2) As to being an evangelist, and thus one who does public speaking before mixed audiences, the Word of God forbids women to occupy this position. "But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness" (1 Timothy 2:12).

(3) As to her claim to receive visions or prophecies, the Bible teaches that the age of such has passed.

*"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered; and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land"* (Zechariah. 13:1-2).

This is a prophecy of the coming of Christ and the ushering in of a new age. When that time comes, the Word says prophets will cease.

In the chapter on love, Paul deals with spiritual gifts.

*"Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away"*

(1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

The miraculous gifts of prophecy, tongues (which were not known to the speaker) and knowledge (knowledge miraculously imparted from God) would cease when the "perfect" came. What is the perfect? It refers to the completed revelation—the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament is called "the perfect law" in James 1:25. Until the New Testament was completed, the spiritual gifts were aids to help spread the gospel. But when the revelation was completed, that which was "in part" ceased.

An illustration would be of the erection of a building. Scaffolding is used to help in the construction, but once the building is completed, the scaffolding (that which is "in part") is taken away. We have those who claim to work miracles today, but none passes the test of what constitutes a miracle in comparison to what Christ and the apostles performed. If miraculous powers exist today, then why doesn't someone raise the dead? Or why not feed over 5,000 hungry people with five loaves and two fish as Christ did? (John 6:9ff)

Christ told the apostles:

*"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come"*

(John 16:1-2).

If the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all the truth, then there is no more truth to be revealed after that first century. Thus those who claim to have a new revelation, whether Joseph Smith (Mormons), Charles T. Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses), Ellen G. White (Seventh Day Adventists), or anyone else, are claiming that what Christ promised did not come to pass! If the Spirit did not reveal all the truth, then Christ is a false prophet, and therefore not the Son of God, and we are without hope. There are many passages that proclaim the completeness of God's revelation within the pages of what we know as the Bible, and that we are not to add to it. (See Galatians 1:6-8; Revelation 22:18-19; Jude 3; 1 Corinthians 4:6; Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6.)

(4) Many of Mrs. White's prophecies turned out to be false, meaning that she was a false prophet. That Seventh Day Adventists regard her as a prophet is evidenced by many witnesses. Stanley Harris, a SDA pastor is quoted as saying: "...and yet, my dear friends, she did one of the greatest works that I have ever known since John the Revelator. She's to me one of the greatest prophets that have ever lived. Why? Because she had the same gift that Daniel had." (From a cassette tape "Greatest Prophet Since John." from "God's Last Call," tape #811).

That view cannot be dismissed as simply one individual's opinion. This is the official position of the denomination itself. From a statement in 1928: "As Samuel was a prophet of Israel for his day, as Jeremiah was a prophet of Israel in the days of captivity, as John the Baptist came as a special messenger of the Lord to prepare the way for Christ's coming, so we believe that Mrs. White was a prophet to the church of Christ today." Numerous other quotations could be cited, but let us look now as just a few

of her prophecies.

(a) Mrs. White prophesied the world would end in 1843, 1844, 1845 & 1851: "Now time is almost finished, (1851) and what we have been 6 years in learning they will have to learn in months" (**Early Writings**. 57). Over a century and half have passed, and the world has not yet come to an end.

(b) Concerning some of her "revelations," one author noted: "In one of her visions her accompanying angels told her that the time of salvation for all sinners ended in 1844. She now claims the door of mercy is still open...In another vision she discovered that women should wear short dresses with pants and she and her sister followers dressed this way for eight years. But the ridiculous custom has now been abandoned..." (Biederwolf, **Seventh-Day Adventism**. 8f).

(c) "(First Vision 12/1844)

*"It was just as impossible for them (those that gave up their faith in the 1844 movement) to get on the path again and go to the city, as all the wicked world which God had rejected. They fell all the way along the path one after another," (Foregoing now deleted) until we heard the voice of God like many waters, **which gave us the day and hour of Jesus' coming**. (emp. mine—JDT) The living saints, 144,000 in number, knew and understood the voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake. When God spake the time, he poured on us the Holy Ghost, and our faces began to light up and shine with the glory of God as Moses' did when he came down from Mount Sinai" (A Word to the Little Flock, 1847 edition. 14).*

Then later she claimed she did not know "the day and hour." "I have not the slightest knowledge as to the time spoken by the voice of God. I heard the hour proclaimed, but had no remembrance of that hour after I came out of vision" (Selected Messages. 298, 1889).

Two observations about this "vision." First, Christ said that no one knew the day or hour, not even himself. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:36-37). Second, it is hard to imagine a prophet "forgetting" a revelation from God.

No prophet in the whole Bible ever forgot what God had revealed.

There are countless other statements of Mrs. White that were "prophecies" that did not come to pass, or that contradicted the clear teaching of the Bible. Thus this qualifies her to be labeled a false prophet. God spoke about such in Deuteronomy 18:20-22:

*"But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."*

God has warned us repeatedly about false prophets, saying they would come in sheep's clothing to deceive us. "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

Paul warned the Corinthian Christians about those who would claim to be apostles and servants of Christ, but who truly were deceivers.

*"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).*

We do not expect Satan's ministers to be wearing red suits, sporting a pitchfork, tail, and horns. No one would believe them. But if they disguise themselves so as to appear godly and righteous, the Bible says they will deceive many. That's why we have John's warning: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test

the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

One final question: If God intended for the church to observe the Sabbath, why was this not revealed in the New Testament? Why did he wait for over 1,800 years to reveal this vital truth?

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## Understanding The Church Of Christ (6)

Wayne Fancher | Searcy, Arkansas, USA

So far I have tried to explain that the majority of those in the Church of Christ believe the Bible is the word of God. We believe the Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament and that the Church is supposed to be under the authority of the New Covenant today. The third thing someone needs to understand about us to understand why we do what we do, is how we view the New Covenant. We view the New Covenant as a covenant of grace and truth and we view that truth as law.

John 1:17: “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

The beauty of the New Covenant is that there is grace from God shown to us through Christ crucified and the power of the blood of the Christ, so our sins can actually be forgiven. However, the New Covenant is not just a covenant of grace from God, it is also a covenant of truth from God. We understand and view this truth revealed in the New Covenant as law.

Hebrews 7:11-12:

*“Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.”*

The changing of the priesthood from the Levitical and Aaronic priesthoods under the law of Moses, to Jesus being a priest after the order of Melchizedek, required a changing of the law by God. There is a changing of the law in the New Covenant, not a doing away with law.

John 12:48: “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.”

Hebrews 1:1-2:

*“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke to the fathers in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”*

James 2:12: “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.”

Revelation 20:12:

*“And 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.”*

We are going to be judged by the words Jesus spoke in the last day. The New Covenant is what God has spoken to us through His Son. James 2:12 also tells us we are going to be judged by the perfect law of liberty. Then in Revelation 20:12 we see that when judgment takes place “the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which written in the books.” If God calls it law and we are going to be judged by it, I feel very comfortable calling it law and viewing the New Covenant as law.



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

John 14:15 does not say, "If you love me, consider my suggestions". A commandment is not a suggestion or an option. It is a command that God expects us to obey by faith.

The New Covenant is a covenant of grace and truth. It is a mixture of grace and law. We have access to this saving grace of God in this covenant by faith produced by the truth of the word of God revealed in the New Covenant (Romans 5:1-3, Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 10:17, John 20:30-31). Then by that faith we keep and obey the commands given by God in the New Covenant (Galatians 5:6, Hebrews 11:8, James 2:26).

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## Rightly Dividing The Word Of God (2)

Tommy J. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

We continue our study of "rightly divid(ing) the word of truth" (God's revealed word; 2 Timothy 2:15). In the last issue we pointed out that people must learn the difference between faith (what the word of God says) and human opinion (what people want it to say). We walk by faith (that which is revealed, Romans 10:17), and not by sight (what men think it says, 2 Corinthians 5:7). Remember, man's opinions are not God's revelation.

But, after men acknowledge the necessity of walking by faith (using the word of God) and not by sight (human opinions), they still encounter trouble because many do not handle the word of God properly. Many of the differences that exist today in the religious world occur because people fail to properly understand how to use the word of God properly in making applications. It is certainly true 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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). But, it is not true that all scripture applies to all people, in all situations, all the time. There are differences as to when the revealed truths of God are to be applied. Proper application depends on the time and situation when the words were spoken, to whom the words were spoken and why they were spoken.

When I first seriously began to search the scriptures, I learned there are some basics that must be followed if one is going to rightly divide the word of truth. These same principles would also apply to everyday situations. To make the proper application of a scripture under consideration, one needs to ask certain questions. Who said it? What was said? When was it said? To whom was it said? Why was it said? Properly answering and applying these questions will go a long way in rightly dividing the word of God.

In rightly dividing scripture we must first ask, who said it. Everything in the word of God is truthfully recorded, but everything in the word of God was not spoken by God for man to obey. The words of the devil are recorded, and he even quoted scripture, but his words were not to be heeded.

What is said, when it was said and to whom it is said are also important considerations. God told Noah to build an ark, Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice. What was said was plain enough, but to whom were they spoken, and when were they spoken? They are not for us today. Why they were spoken is also revealed. Noah was to build an ark to save him and his family from the flood. Abraham was to offer his Son as a test of faith. But they are not commands for us to follow today. But, in these examples you surely can see the importance of asking the questions, Who spoke? What was said? To Whom was it said? When was it said? And why was it said?

When the previous questions are not properly applied we have religious division. People will draw false scriptural conclusions when they do not handle the word of God properly. One of the areas where the importance of handling the word of God correctly comes into play is recognizing the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

By rightly dividing the word of God one can clearly see there is a difference between the Old and New Testaments. A failure to understand the difference has led people to introduce into the Lord's church several false doctrines, beliefs, and practices based on Old Testament law and precepts. Things such as observing the Sabbath, instrumental music, divorce and remarriage for every cause, and burning of incense are justified because they were practiced in the Old Testament. They say, if they were practiced in the Old Testament then they can be practiced today.

But, why stop there? Why not also teach animal sacrifices, polygamy, Leviratic marriage (a man required to marry his brother's widow if there were no children). None of these things are applicable to us for New Testament practices. When this is pointed out we are accused of "not believing the whole Bible." This is not true, but it is one of the reasons why such a lesson still needs to be taught today.

Yes, the Bible is one book, divided into two parts, the Old and New Testament, both inspired of God (2.Peter 1:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). The New Testament writers also divided it that way in Hebrews 1:1-2. In fact, Jesus furthered divided the Old Testament into three parts: the Law, Prophets, and Psalms (Luke 24:44-45). The Old Testament itself divides into two dispensations, the Patriarchal – from Adam to Moses (no written law) and the Mosaic – Moses to Malachi (written law, Deuteronomy 5:2-3).

God never intended the Old Testament to be a permanent law (Hebrews 7:12; 8:8-9; Galatians 3:18-25). While the Old Testament is no longer binding on man as a system of law for religious doctrine and practices today, many of the principles have been true since the beginning. Jesus' death on the cross removed the Old Testament as law (keep that in mind, Ephesians 2:15-16; Colossians 2:14-16). In its place, Jesus gave a new law, His law (Hebrews 9:15; 10:9-10).

The Old Testament is not our law today (Galatians 5:4; 2:21)). As one reads the New Testament one learns that one cannot be a Jew religiously and a Christian at the same time (Philippians 3:3-7; Romans 7:2-4). We will be judged by the words of Christ (John 12:48) and not Moses (Matthew 17:5). Jesus didn't destroy the Law; He fulfilled it (Matthew 5:17-18). He ended it (Romans 10:4).

Some may ask, if we are not under Old Testament law then what purpose does the Law (Old Testament) serve (Galatians 3:19)? Note Romans 15:4. We use it as an example of how God dealt with sinful men (1 Corinthians 10). We use it to learn of the origin and nature of man. We use it to learn New Testament vocabulary: sin, sacrifice, atonement, forgiveness, offering, and the like. It has types and shadows of truth later revealed in the New Testament (Heb.10:1). In it we learn of God's preparation (prophecies) for sending His Son to become our Savior. It was designed to lead one to Christ, not make one a Christian (Galatians 3:22-25). Note the phrases "kept under guard" and "kept for the faith afterward." People are Christians because they obey the gospel, not the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:1; John 1:17; Romans 1:16).

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## Our Redemption

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

*"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7)*

There is a lot of information supplied to us in this verse about our redemption. It should be of the utmost interest and concern to every person of what is said on this subject. The eternal destiny of everyone is determined, not only by their understanding of this matter, but also by their willingness to submit to the requirements made by the Lord. Salvation is not just by grace. God requires faith, and faith demands obedience (Ephesians 2:8; James 2:24).

**The sphere of one's redemption – in Him.** The apostle had just revealed that every spiritual blessing one can have and enjoy was found in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). If all spiritual blessings are in Christ, how many are outside of Him? None! It is only through Jesus that mankind can be saved. Peter said, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Notice how many

times Paul uses the expression “in Christ” or some similar words in Ephesians 1 (verses 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 20). We are not left to speculate on how one can get into Christ. The Scripture plainly reveals this valuable information to us. *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”* (Romans 6:3).

**The price paid for our redemption – His blood.** This tells us it cost Jesus His life. He willingly suffered and died so that you and I could live. What an incredible act of love and grace. Paul said:

*“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:7-8).

Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22). Yet not just any blood would do; that of bulls and goats could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). It took the blood of the sinless Son of God to redeem us from our iniquities (Hebrews 9:12). What a high price paid to obtain our salvation. Clearly, this is an indication of how much Jehovah loves us and the value which is placed on our souls (John 3:16).

**An explanation of redemption – the forgiveness of sins.** The word “redemption” is defined as:

*“Deliverance on account of the ransom paid as spoken of the deliverance from the power and consequences of sin which Christ procured by laying down His life as a ransom for those who believe”* (**The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament**).

Sin separates one from God the Father (Isaiah 59:1-2). All accountable to Jehovah are guilty of sin (Romans 3:10, 23). Those at Ephesus had been dead in trespasses and sins and needed forgiveness (Ephesians 2:1). We likewise need forgiveness because of our offenses; dead in those sins and need to be made alive. For one to obtain forgiveness it required the death and the shed blood of the Lamb of God (John 1:29). The message to those Jews on Pentecost who asked what they needed to do to be saved, *“Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38). No matter the sin, if one will believe and obey the Lord, he can be forgiven.

**The basis of redemption – the riches of His grace.** We certainly do not merit salvation. God owes us nothing and there is no way we can earn our redemption. We have no price with which to pay for even one sin we have committed. It is by the grace of the Almighty Father in heaven that we can be the beneficiaries of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He does indeed require faith on our part (Ephesian 2:8). Yet even when we express our faith by obedience, if not for grace, we would still die lost. Notice the use of the word “**riches**” in describing the grace of God. This means the abundance of grace and goodness which has been shown toward sinful men. What a truly amazing God we serve!

Want to be saved? Your redemption is in Christ. He is source or author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:8-9).

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## The Pit

Mike Thomas

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get out by himself. A feeler came along and said, 'I really feel for you down there.' A thinker walked by and said, 'It's illogical that someone would fall down there.' A Pharisee said, 'Only bad people fall into pits, you know.' A self-pitying person said, 'You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit!' A preacher said, 'You deserve to fall into a pit.' A Christian Scientist said, 'The pit is all in your head.' A psychologist said, 'Your mother and father are to blame for your being in that pit.' An optimist said, 'Things could be worse.' A pessimist said, 'Things will get worse.' A Christian came along, took him by the hand, and lifted him out of the pit.

I don't know who penned those words. They were taken from a poem entitled “The Pit,” whose author is unknown to me. Nevertheless, I think the writer had an interesting perspective in noting the difference between professed compassion for others and genuine concern. The world is filled with people who claim to care about the person in a pit, but until someone actually reaches down and helps them out, they haven't made a difference in that person's life. It sounds similar to the parable Jesus taught on the Good

Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), when the priest and the Levite refused to help a man near death on the side of the road. They "passed by on the other side" because they did not want to be burdened with the inconvenience of caring for others. By contrast, a Samaritan came upon the same scene yet responded in "compassion" because of his genuine love for others. This was especially remarkable since the Jews and Samaritans despised one another as a whole (John 4:9). Yet this did not keep the Samaritan from having pity on a wounded soul. After highlighting the man's godly character, Jesus told His audience to "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). God wants His people to "do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).

This is another great lesson to learn from The Pit. People need our help, especially spiritually. It is not enough to feel bad for those whose lives are ravaged by sin. That concern alone does not help them out of the pit. We must actually reach down (in love and pity) and give them a chance to crawl out by extending the gospel to them. Paul explained it this way, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:13-14, 17). God has provided a way for all mankind to be saved from sin by hearing and obeying the gospel (1:16). However, this message must be taught from God's inspired word if sinners are to learn it. This is what Paul meant when he said God "has in due time manifested His word through preaching" (Titus 1:3). When men are in error, they need someone to take them aside and explain the way of God more accurately to them (Acts 18:26).

I may feel sorry for those outside of Christ, in the pit of sin, but until I look for ways to help them out, my pity will be of no benefit to them or God.

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**a response to**  
**"THE BIBLE VERSUS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST" (2)**

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

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Someone recently pointed me to an article claiming to expose the falsehood of the Church of Christ. We will be responding to the content of the article over a period of several months. The original article, by James L. Melton, can be found at [www.av1611.org/jmelton/chchurch.html](http://www.av1611.org/jmelton/chchurch.html)  
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**The Church Name**

Mr. Melton makes two false statements in his opening sentence to this section. He wrote:

*"The Church of Christ claims to reserve for itself the ONLY scriptural name for a New Testament church, although the term 'church of Christ' is found nowhere in the Bible."*

I don't know of anyone who would affirm that "Church of Christ" is the ONLY scriptural name for a New Testament church. The Lord's church is referred to a few different ways in the New Testament: "the Way" (Acts 19:9 23), "church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2), "house of God" (1 Timothy 3:15), "kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14-15), etc.. I believe any of these - any description used in the Bible - would be scriptural to use. Why then do we use "Church of Christ"? I cannot speak for all Churches of Christ in the world, but I can speak for the local church I work with. Years ago, when the congregation began to meet together, we considered using "Church of God" on our signs and in our advertising. We decided against it because "Church of God" is used by adherents to Armstrongism and some Pentecostal churches, and we wanted to avoid being confused with them. Also, when Christians from other areas are in Kingston and are looking for a place to worship, they will likely be looking for a place which identifies itself as "Church of Christ." Having said that, we do not believe, nor do I know of anyone among the churches of Christ who does

believe that "Church of Christ" is the ONLY scriptural name for a New Testament church.

In fact, the idea of the church having or needing a formal name is not consistent with what we see in the New Testament. As mentioned above, these are descriptions (the church belonging to Christ, the church belonging to God, the household of God, the kingdom of God, the temple, the body of Christ, the flock of God, the bride of Christ, etc.). They are not formal names. Consider an illustration. What is the name of the moon? Don't say moon - that's not a name, that's a description. We haven't given our moon a name. Why not? Because there is only one. It doesn't need a name to distinguish it from other moons, for we only have one moon. We distinguish the planets by name (Earth, Saturn, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Venus, Uranus, Neptune) because there are several of them (sorry Pluto). We can't just say "the planet" and expect someone to know which planet we are referring to. But, if we say "the moon," everyone knows what we are talking about. In the early centuries, if someone spoke of "the church," they knew exactly what was being spoken about. It is a modern thing (since the Protestant Reformation) to have to distinguish between this church or that church. It is a denominational thing. It's grounded in religious division due to differences in doctrine and practice.

Melton said, "the term 'church of Christ' is found nowhere in the Bible." Either (1) he has not read the book of Romans all the way through, (2) he has, but didn't do so very carefully, or (3) he is banking on the ignorance of his readers and hoping they will accept him at his word. Romans 16:16 reads, "Salute one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you."

Melton scoffs at the idea that since the church belongs to Christ we believe it should be called after His name. He identifies such as "the result of human reasoning, not Bible study." Let me be blunt. There is more Bible study involved in concluding we should glorify Christ in the "name" (description) we use for the church than there is in calling a church "Baptist," "Presbyterian," "Free Methodist," etc.. These names are nothing but the product of human reasoning and doctrinal division.

Years ago, I studied with a woman by the name of Sue. She was adamant that it didn't matter what the church was called, that names really don't matter. So, I started calling her "Bob." As we continued to study, I kept calling her "Bob." She was visibly annoyed with me. Why? What was the problem? She got my point - names do matter. If a man and woman get married, it is custom that the woman takes the man's last name. All you fellas out there, what would you think if your wife took your neighbour's last name instead? Names matter. The bride of Christ should wear His name.

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## Prayer and the Name of Jesus

Bill White | Hammond, Indiana, USA  
from "The Preceptor," April 1985

*The world has lost the right of prayer,  
and saints have failed to pray;  
What loss sustained beyond repair!  
how blind of heart are they!  
The Father speaketh in His word,  
He talks no other way!  
And to converse with Him, our Lord,  
we must take time to pray!  
There is no trial, grief, or pain,  
no moment of the day,  
But that we may in Jesus' name  
incline our souls and pray!*

These are the beautiful words of the song "Pray All the Time" by L.O. Sanderson. They should provoke us all to much thought about the blessed privilege and honor God has favored Christians with in prayer. It is

perhaps one of the most neglected privileges of being a child of God. I believe the degree one recognizes the joy and benefit of prayer is directly proportionate to one's closeness with God. We often look with scorn upon the denominational concept of "a personal relationship with God and Christ," and yet I fear those in the Lord's church do not pursue such a relationship as they should. Perhaps that is why prayer is no more important to some than it is. The opening line of the song "Pray All the Time" suggests the real issue. People outside of Christ do not have the avenue of prayer such as the child of God enjoys. It therefore behooves every Christian to learn what a loss they have suffered when prayer is not important, meaningful, and useful to them. It is because Christ paid the ransom price for men's souls that the right of prayer and all its blessings are enjoyed. We should seek to learn more about the privilege of prayer and Jesus' name as it relates to the Christian.

What does it mean to pray "in Jesus' name"? In Colossians 3:17 we are told, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." The phrase "in the name of" means "by the authority or power of." An example of this concept would be an officer of the law in pursuit of a criminal shouting, "halt in the name of the law." He is saying, "I order you to stop by the authority given me by the government." When one prays "in the name of Christ," he is exercising a right given him by God.

In John 1:12 we read, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." The inspired writer is not saying here that all who profess faith in the name of Jesus automatically become children of God. He is saying that faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is the motivating power that leads one to repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ as God's Son and be baptized unto the remission of sins. Perhaps this illustration will help clarify this point. My wife and I went to the county courthouse in Hankamer, Texas to apply for a marriage license. Upon receiving the marriage license, we then had the right to get married according to the laws of the State of Texas, but we were not yet married. Faith in the name of Christ gives one the right to become a child of God, but until all the requirements of becoming a child of God are met, one is not a Christian.

Concerning the right or privilege of prayer, when we pray "in Jesus' name" we are confessing awareness that our right to approach God in prayer comes only through a proper relationship with Christ, accomplished by one's obedience to God's terms of pardon.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). This verse reinforces the thought that only through one's relationship with Christ as an obedient believer can one approach God either for salvation or in prayer.

Chapters 14, 15, and 16 of John repeatedly establish the fact that prayer to God is possible only through Jesus Christ. Christ once told His apostles:

*And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full*  
(John 16:23-24).

It may be that in verse 23 Jesus was telling His apostles that while He was here on earth they had demonstrated dullness of comprehension and had often asked Him questions because they did not understand His teachings, but when the Comforter was come He would teach the apostles all things (John 14:26). But I believe Christ was also teaching them that they shall not ask Him directly, as while He was on earth, but of the Father in His name. Prior to Jesus becoming the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 9:15) nothing was asked in His name. But now all things are to be done through Him (Colossians 3:17). Prayer "in Jesus' name" simply means that because one is of Christ's fold (John 10) he has the right and power to approach God in prayer. While one is not "in Christ" he is:

*... separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now*

*in Christ Jesus you who formerly were afar off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12-13).*

*Since then we have a great high priest who is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).*

These three verses inform us of Christ's mediatorial and intercessory activities as high priest in behalf of those who belong to Him. This passage provides one of the greatest thoughts of comfort found in all of God's word: that Christ took a fleshly body, and dwelt among us. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1 :14). While he was in the flesh He encountered the same infirmities and temptations that all humanity suffers. Because this is true, He is perfectly suited to "plead our case" before the Father. Since that is true we can boldly (with confidence), the Hebrew writer says, seek God's mercy and help, not only when we have sinned, but anytime we need help to resist temptation or need comfort in time of distress.

I am reminded of an incident that took place when I was about nine years old. My brother had made a beautiful hand tooled and laced, leather notebook in his ninth grade shop class at school. On the front was a horsehead, and on the back was his full name. My mother was so very proud of the wonderful job he had done on it. It had taken him several weeks to complete the work. As time went by, the notebook was placed up in the attic for safe keeping but out of the way. It had remained there for a long time collecting dust. It just so happened that I was in need of a piece of leather for my toy gun and holster set. Using the logic of a nine year old, I determined there was no reason not to cut a piece of leather from the notebook; after all, it had not been used or even looked at for months. I took my brother's leather cutting knife and carefully cut a piece the size I needed out of the back of the notebook. Just to be on the safe side I hid the notebook under some things. Well, just as God has declared " ... and be sure you sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23), the notebook was found. How I can remember my mother's anger! I was immediately confronted with the evidence of guilt and sentenced to be whipped for my transgression. But not only do I remember my mother's anger, I also remember her great sorrow, for indeed she was so proud of my brother's accomplishment. Just about the time punishment was to be executed, my brother came in and learned of the proceedings. Even though he too was angered and hurt by what I had done, he spoke with mother and convinced her he could mend the notebook. He persuaded her that the damage would be hardly noticeable. You see my brother and I were very, very close. My brother knew I enjoyed playing cowboys and Indians about as much as anything. He could put himself in my shoes. On the other hand he knew how proud my mother was of the notebook and how hurt she was to see it ruined. Because of his special relationship to us both, he was able to mend the breach between mother and me. I was not whipped, and mother was satisfied that the notebook would be mended "good as new." In a greater sense, that is what Christ does as our mediator and intercessor. Having experienced temptation Himself He perfectly knows what we must contend with on a daily basis. As deity He is aware of the need for perfect justice to be served and satisfied. Having paid the penalty price for sin, He can appease God the Father's wrath concerning our sins and iniquities. Not only so, but though our sins bring God sorrow, through Christ's death and our repentance that sorrow is changed into joy in heaven (Luke 15:8-10).

Jesus is our High Priest today. It was part of the high priest's duty under the Law of Moses to be the mediator between God and His people Israel. It was the high priest and only the high priest who entered the Holy of Holies once each year to sprinkle blood upon the ark of the covenant in atonement for Israel's sin. Jesus as our High Priest has entered into the true Holy of Holies (heaven) and presented His blood in the presence of God and has obtained eternal redemption for us.

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered though the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation: and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own*

*blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant... (Hebrews 9:11-15).*

When a child of God lifts up his prayers unto God, Christ confesses him before the Father and sues the Father for our petitions. Ephesians 4:32 seems to touch upon this principle: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." Because Christ has shed His blood in obedience to God's will and because the Christian has crucified himself with Christ (Galatians 2:20), God for Christ's sake (so as not to make His death meaningless) hears our prayers and grants our petitions according to His infinite wisdom. You remember the illustration I gave concerning the notebook my brother made? My mother for my brother's sake (since he is the one who had worked so long and hard to make the notebook) granted his request that I not be punished but allowed him to mend the damage done. This is the principle set forth in Ephesians 4:32.

Is it essential that we say the words "in Jesus' name" or something equivalent to that when we pray either publically or privately? Has one sinned if he fails to say the words "in Jesus' name" when he prays? Remember, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to the Father (Colossians 3:17) . Remember also that "in Jesus' name," as it is found in Colossians 3:17 means, "by His authority and power." Yet we do many things "in Jesus' name" without vocalizing that phrase. "For where two or three have gathered together in my name (emphasis mine, bw) there I am in their midst" (Matthew 18:20). We assemble each Lord's day to worship God "in Jesus' name," but no one necessarily announces such. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name (emphasis mine, bw) because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward" (Mark 9:41). We do many benevolent deeds by authority of Christ (in His name), yet rarely if ever does one say those words as they render such benevolence. We must remember that prayer in Jesus' name means that our prayers are offered as a right or privilege found as a child of God "in Christ." Thus we must conclude that saying "in Jesus' name" at the conclusion of a prayer is not some "magic formula" we must follow, and no sin is committed if the phrase is not uttered, so long as the individual is cognizant of Christ's mediation.

However, it is usually expedient to use this phrase or something similar during public prayer. It is certainly not sinful to use the phrase and it will surely prevent a weaker brother's conscience being offended. Paul discusses how Christian liberties are not to become stumbling blocks to those who are weak or new in the faith. We are to be mindful of one another. "For not one of us lives unto himself..." (Romans 14:7).

*I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died (Romans 14:14-15).*

These few verses establish the principle we wish to consider. Although Paul writes of the eating of meats, the principle can easily be applied to public prayer. Those who have matured in the faith know that the phrase "in Jesus' name" is not a formula to be followed, but they recognize that only in Christ do we have the right of prayer. However, babes in Christ who have not yet learned this could easily be offended if the phrase is not uttered during public prayer. I can recall one occasion when I was assisting in the passing of the communion emblems. The brother who was called upon to offer thanks for the unleavened bread did not say the words "in Jesus' name" as he prayed. As I took the plate containing the bread to the first row of pews, I had to wait as the sister to whom I was giving the bread offered her own prayer. Though she did not tell me, later she felt compelled to do so, thinking the prayer offered was unscriptural. I am confident this was the case. I believe it is preferable that the phrase "in Jesus' name" be uttered by those called upon to lead public prayer. It also serves as a reminder to all, including the one leading in prayer, that only "in Christ" is this privilege ours.



There is a great need for all who seek God's blessings in prayer to diligently study this subject. I commend this topic to my brothers in Christ who proclaim the gospel. There is much teaching that needs to be done. I do not believe we spend enough time ""preaching Jesus." Too many do not understand about Christ as our High Priest. Prayer is not valuable and cherished by far too many because Christ is not truly real to them. Indeed the words of L.O. Sanderson's song hit home:

*The world has lost the right of prayer,  
and saints have failed to pray;  
What loss sustained beyond repair!  
how blind of heart are they!  
There is no trial, grief, or pain,  
no moment of the day,  
But that we may in Jesus' name  
incline our souls and pray!*

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## **Determining the Binding Elements of An Example**

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

We noted that examples are given in the New Testament and they are binding upon us today. The examples that are applied universally to various people in diverse locations and in many different circumstances are the examples that are binding. Throughout the book of Acts, for instance, we see numerous examples of conversion. In each of the examples, we noted they end in the believer submitting to baptism in water for the remission of sins. Therefore, it can be concluded that is a binding example and practice that we should keep today.

However, not all examples are binding—even apostolic examples! For example, the apostle Paul took a vow and cut his hair (Acts 18:18). We are not expected to keep the same vow and cut our hair if we want to be faithful Christians. So, we must use discernment and understanding to ascertain which biblical, apostolic examples are approved by God. This means there may be some elements of Bible examples that are incidental to a particular situation and circumstance that are not binding upon us now.

An example is binding when:

1. The purpose and intent is clear—in relationship to baptism, the reason immersion in water is practiced is because it is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
2. The element of the example is binding—take the Lord's Supper as an example. The elements of the Lord's Supper are unleavened bread (Luke 22:7, 19) and fruit of the vine (Luke 22:18). Concerning baptism, it must be immersion in water (Acts 10:47). Philip went down into the water with the eunuch (Acts 8:38), demonstrating there was enough water for it to be immersion—not simply sprinkling or pouring. No other elements in these examples were used and we are not at liberty to substitute anything else for them.
3. The subject of the example must be considered. When we read of a baptism in the New Testament it was of a believer (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36-37; 16:30-31, 34). There is no example of babies, or unbelievers, baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; only penitent believers were baptized in the New Testament.
4. Uniformity and similarities are also indicative of the binding nature of an approved example. Three thousand in Jerusalem were baptized (Acts 2:41), many people in Samaria were baptized (Acts 8:12), and Cornelius was baptized in Caesarea (Acts 10:47-48). There are similarities in each of the accounts, but they were all slightly different. However, they agree in the essentials—purpose, intent, elements, and subjects.

Even in these examples, where some elements are binding, there are specific details which are merely incidental to the purpose and nature of the example themselves. Consider: in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost when 3,000 were baptized, it was about 9 A.M. (Acts 2:15), whereas the Philippian jailer was

baptized at night (Acts 16:33); Christ instituted the Lord's Supper at night (Mark 14:17), on a Thursday, and in an upper room (Mark 14:15). In Acts 20:7 Paul preached until midnight, but there is not a mandate that preachers continue preaching until midnight. (Aren't you thankful for that?) Those Christians that met to observe the Lord's Supper in Acts 20:7 were also in an upper room (Acts 20:8), but we do not have to have an upper room to partake of the Lord's Supper. While there are binding aspects to each of these examples, the time of day and location are incidental to the example and not binding.

Cultural practices surrounding many of the examples are not binding either. For instance, Jesus washed the disciples' feet in John 13. In a time when people traveled by foot, washing a guest's feet was an accepted and common practice of hospitality. This was not an ordinance given to be kept in the churches; it was an example of service, submission, and selflessness. Greeting one another with a kiss was another cultural aspect of welcoming guests and friends (Romans 16:16). We can learn to be kind-hearted, friendly, and hospitable to people today without greeting one another with a holy kiss. These were cultural customs that serve as invaluable applications and examples, and we can learn lessons from them, but the custom is not a binding example upon us today.

If there is any variation between approved, biblical examples then it must be an incidental; therefore, not binding. As noted above, the 3,000 were baptized during the daytime, but the jailer was baptized at night. Cornelius was likely baptized in his house (Acts 11:12; 10:47-48), whereas Lydia was likely baptized in a river (Acts 16:13, 15). May a person be baptized inside? Yes. May a person be baptized outside? Yes. Neither of these incidentals are binding requirements nor essential to keep.

In the Bible we read of the institution of the Lord's Supper, where it was held at night in an upper room. That does not mean observing the Lord's Supper in the morning is sinful. We never read of a person being baptized in a church building, much less a baptistery, in the New Testament. That does not invalidate a person's baptism who was baptized inside a church building. A person who was baptized in a baptistery is just as much a Christian as the person who was baptized outdoors in a natural body of water. We must use discernment in understanding these examples and which aspects are binding.

Also, we must be aware that some details are given in some accounts, but those details might be missing in others. Remember, variations between examples are incidentals. Some details may be given in one account, but only generally stated in others. In Acts 8, for instance, the Scripture reports both Philip and the eunuch went into the water. This is the only example where it specifies anything about the actions of the one doing the baptizing. Other times, the only information we are given is they were baptized (Acts 18:8). With variation between accounts, or lack of information, we cannot bind what was not intended to be bound, since it is an incidental it is not a binding element.

Where there are incidentals, there is freedom and expediency. We must exercise wisdom in carrying out these examples, but we must also recognize the principles of freedom, liberty, and general authority. We do not have to build a two-story church building in order to keep the Lord's Supper; it is not only baptisms that occurred in natural bodies of water that are genuine. Some elements are simply incidental to the persons involved and the details given in the examples. We must discern the binding aspects of each biblical example.



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