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1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

Leadership in the Church of God (Copyright) by James McBride (United Kingdom)

What principles guide leadership in the Church of God? That question might disturb some brethren, for it implies that the church can be 'led'. Should it? Is 'leadership' necessary? What are the Bible principles for the conduct of the local congregation?

This article addresses the internal workings of the local assembly and its needs. We have established Biblically that church 'denominations' are humanly devised devices for management and control in the church. The Biblical pattern is for local autonomy not structurally beholden to a central organization or hierarchy. So, our question is: how is the local assembly governed?

Everything In Order, Even a cursory reading of the New Testament shows plainly that each local congregation should not be adrift in confusion but must be orderly, with properly appointed leadership. The apostolic writings make this quite clear. When the matter is discussed, they advocate structure 'bishops [overseers] and deacons' (Philippians 1:1), writes Paul. 'Elders' according to Paul and Peter and James.

In no other situation would anarchy, lack of leadership be tolerated! Certainly not in business, or in a sports club, or in government! And the effect of such 'anarchy' in families is plain. The church of God, too, is designed to be an orderly society (I Corinthians 14:40).

The Bible evidence for internal structure in an assembly is overwhelming. But too often the form is misunderstood and abused. As a church evolves, human nature seeks to organize it and almost inevitably it comes to be dominated by a ruling class. Earlier centuries of Christianity witnessed the evolution of a hierarchy of sub-deacons, deacons, priests, bishops on up to - as in the Roman Church - an infallible Pope. Modern church history has witnessed an abusive hierarchy of apostle, prophets, evangelists etc. These are functions, not ranks.

God's heritage, the people of God, became limited to the 'clergy' [Gk kleroo = 'to assign a portion, an inheritance' - I Peter 5:3, Ephesians 1:11]. The brethren became 'mere laity'. And until recent times, the priest or vicar or minister wielded an authority that induced a spirit of fear in the people. The democratic 'spirit of the times' has generally diluted this power over the people. Many, however, remain confused as to the Bible teaching.

The adverse effects of hierarchical authority in the churches of God has been discredited by its 'evil fruit' - and abandoned in some degree. The danger, however, lies in the wholesale abandonment of all authority in the assembly. Past perceived hurts have induced a cynicism about the imposition of authority figures. Bible Christians, however, will be guided by the Scriptures.

Principles of Leadership

There are key guidelines in Scripture for leadership. Ignorance of - or ignoring - them will inevitably generate confusion and ultimate disintegration. The Bible guidelines include discussion on function, attitude, origin, and qualifications for leadership.

Jesus, by word and by example, primarily addressed the matter of attitude. Instructing the apostles in leadership he warned them not to domineer as do secular leaders. The mother of James and John had on their behalf just sought from him an assurance of power positions - to the annoyance of the other disciples. Leaders are, rather, to be servants of the brethren, Jesus tells them (Matthew 20:20-28). As Paul put it, they are "helpers of your joy". He told the elders from the Ephesian assemblies: "Be shepherds of the church of God" (Acts 20:28). Peter described the role of elders in this way: "Be shepherds of God's flock that are under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to [patterns for] the flock" (I Peter 5:1-3).

Church leaders, in other words, are not isolated in some 'ivory tower', but toiling alongside the brethren in the work of the church - just as the shepherd is out on the rough and rocky hillside alongside the flock.

Apostolic Function

The church of God is a 'spiritual organism', the members of the Body being recognized fully only by God. The visible body in the beginning was in two parts - individual independent local assemblies, and a 'roving apostolate'. The latter, during the lifetime of the Twelve, exercised a dual role.

The apostles were commissioned and uniquely inspired by Christ to record and pass on to future generations the

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purity of his teachings. They also laid the foundation for maintaining the integrity and stability of each assembly.

The roles are inter-linked. The apostles personally taught the Gospel message as received from Jesus Christ - 'the truth of the Gospel'. But they also gathered around them 'students' to carry on their work. Timothy is one example. Paul told him: "...the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (II Timothy 2:2). Christ's message once for all 'breathed into' the twelve apostles had to be accurately handed down to following generations. Sadly, this did not always happen, witness the doctrinal disarray in the churches!

Apostolic Delegates

Through his missionary work the apostle Paul raised up churches in many scattered locations. He preached, some responded, and Paul would move on. The new brethren met together for fellowship, and through evangelism their numbers grew. The apostle had a loving care for all these assemblies. He couldn't be regularly with them bodily, so he wrote to them to encourage and guide. Also, in his place he sent out those he had personally trained: to combat error and to generally promote order and sound teaching.

Timothy, for example, labours temporarily in Beroea, Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Rome and is last seen headed for Jerusalem. He was well-known throughout the areas where Paul had ministered. Titus, too, accompanied Paul, for example, to Jerusalem but was also sent to trouble-shoot in Corinth, Macedonia, Crete and in Dalmatia. To the Philippians he sent Epaphroditus.

Assembly Leaders

The other major responsibility of the apostolate was to appoint leaders - elders - to the local congregations (Titus 1:5).

These elders were men from the local assembly - men who were suitably qualified for the task (I Timothy 3, Titus 1). Paul's model was the original pattern used by the Twelve for appointing leadership in Jerusalem: "...choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.... This proposal pleased the whole group.... They presented them to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:1-6)

Paul also drew on the inspired methods of Moses (Deuteronomy 1:9-17): "Take you [Moses said to the people] wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers [Heb. rosh=head] over you". Paul used this, for example, in Antioch and elsewhere (Acts 14:23). He would apply the qualifications for office, the same guidance he outlined to Timothy and guided by the congregations, who were best placed to know the man, he appointed elders in each city. (Leaders in the church are not churned out from some distant denominational or other institution and arbitrarily assigned to an assembly with which they have no previous connection.)

Mature Guides

Some have seen in this a form of 'apostolic succession'. According to the Roman Church, apostolic succession is 'the authoritative and unbroken transmission of the mission and powers conferred by Jesus Christ on St. Peter and the Apostles from them to the present pope and bishops'. That is considered to be effective through an unbroken succession of bishops passed on by ordination (laying-on of hands). Roman 'priests', contrary to Scripture, are deemed to be ordained till death whatever their lifestyle.

The need for 'letters of commendation' witnesses to the independence of local assemblies. There was no 'corporate headquarters' to authenticate traveling elders, evangelists etc. Each assembly had to ensure that visiting brethren were authentic. They had to 'test those who claim to be apostles' (Revelation 2:2, III John 5-8).

The notion of an unbroken chain, by means of ordination, of authentic 'apostles and elders' is a myth. Elders are appointed locally to fulfill a need in each local assembly. There is no mystery attached!

After the Apostles, 'ordination' was overseen under the mature guidance of 'an elder statesman' of the church, a 'wise head' with experience and discernment. It was later abused by power-hungry leadership. But such oversight is no less necessary in our day. It is vital that the appointment of an elder in a local congregation be supervised by someone who is highly respected in the wider church of God.

In a 'start-up' assembly he should be from outside the new group. The procedure helps to authenticate the appointment in the eyes of the church at large. For the church is indeed 'one Body' though separated in varied organizations. A leader appointed internally and without input from an outside experienced hand is more likely to be viewed with a degree of suspicion. He may, for example, have been appointed because he is sympathetic to a peculiar, and unbiblical, destructive false doctrine cherished by that assembly. Paul had divine wisdom guiding his instructions (see I Timothy 5:22)!

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Of course, such an heretical group will probably ignore 'intervention' from outside. If so, their credibility as an authentic part of the Body would be noted, and it may become impossible to co-operate with them.

In sum, when an assembly is of sufficient size to require a formal structure (perhaps ten or so families in regular committed attendance) an elder ought to be appointed in accord with these criteria. They are reliable local men of proven worth and 'known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom' (Acts 6:3), and 'famous in the congregation'.

The Presbytery

Clearly, to have multiple elders presiding over a dozen or so brethren would be a redundancy. So why 'elders in every city'? In Paul's day unlike today there were no 'denominations'. There was one visible body of believers, one flock. But they assembled independently in small groups, meeting in houses (see, for example, Romans 16) which may have been, as with the synagogues in Jerusalem, common language groups. Or perhaps brethren mostly assembled in various nearby locations in each city.

However, divided, each independent group had a presiding elder. But being at that time visibly 'one church' the elders worked in concert. They acted together, for example in appointment of new leaders, as with Timothy (I Timothy 4:14). They were, too, familiar with one another (see Acts 2: 42-47, 20:13-37). In modern terms, all church of God elders and assemblies in, say, Greater London or in Los Angeles or in Sydney would be in harmonious co-operation!

While meeting independently, yet they all came together on various occasions. An example is for the purpose of taking part in the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:18) and at other times. Also in times of crisis as in the church at Antioch (Acts 14:27) or in Jerusalem (Ch. 15:4, 12). Indeed, in Jerusalem in that first flush of fellowship they came together joyfully in the Temple daily.

Spiritual Gifts

As an assembly begins to grow, it will become apparent that the brethren are each gifted in some way by Jesus Christ. Wrote Paul to the infant Roman church: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us-" (Romans 12:6-8). He lists them and perhaps surprisingly 'leadership' doesn't head the list!

But all the gifts in an assembly are vitally needed. A mature assembly will be 'fitly joined together' to accomplish the work Jesus has set for it. [Each Christian should seek ways within or outside of a church institution by which he or she can hone their inborn skills and spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church, for example, speech or music or accountancy training.]

It's essential that brethren 'don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together' (Hebrews 10:25). Only by regular contact and committed involvement by everyone in the work of a local assembly can Christ achieve his purpose for it. A huge failing of the Body of Christ in our day is the 'butterfly Christian' who wings from group to group, never settling for long in one place and forever sampling but not becoming rooted and attached! He or she frustrates the work of Christ. Their spiritual gifts cannot be properly integrated into His work, nor his or her gifts, for example, of evangelism identified.

Real Relationships

The intimacy of a small group favors fellowship, prayer, personal growth. Here's Paul's instruction: "Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing; but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

By face-to-face encounter perhaps literally across a table! We can indeed encourage and pray for one another, learn one another's needs, share their joys and their sorrows, deploy our spiritual gifts. Such a format aids our understanding and participation, as the brethren or visitors can have dialogue with one another. You might like to check the 'one another/each other' verses in the Bible! The only conceivable way for us to adequately follow God's guidance in the Scriptures is through intimate, regular face-to-face contact in a small intimate and loving group.

This kind of interaction favors and enhances the growth of the individual and of the whole church. The impersonality of a large assembly is a barrier, and favors cliques, boredom, ignorance.

In this sense the assembly is 'congregational'. Everyone has a part in its activity according to their gifts. But the whole congregation in turn is to honor and submit to its leadership.

What Do Elders Do?

To maintain godly order in an assembly, therefore, demands someone who is properly gifted. They are not chosen from the 'old boy network' or because of their generous financial support, etc. Elders must have the gifts of the Spirit necessary to be an overseer (Acts 20:28). They will have demonstrated to their brethren these gifts along with proven godly character.

While being aware that we are all brothers, the shepherd must shepherd - he leads. That's his job (see Psalm 23).

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Each is responsible for that part of 'God's flock that is under your care' (I Peter 5:2).

He is to 'feed my sheep'. He is to guard the brethren from predators from within and without. He is to maintain that assembly as a beacon of probity in its neighborhood. He is to be an example to the flock of righteous living. He must be a mature Christian 'not a novice' able to boldly defend the Word in face of false teaching and be sufficiently Biblically literate to teach sound doctrine defined as good basic Christian practice (Titus 2, 3). He is to counsel, and to anoint the sick. He guides and encourages the assembly and nourishes the spiritual gifts of each of the brethren, preparing them for 'works of service'. He is, in a sense, the 'father' of that church family and presides over its spiritual and material welfare.

No small task, indeed! And it isn't surprising that he is to be open to scrutiny from others. All of us should 'weigh carefully what is said' (I Corinthians 14:29).

Responsible To Christ

It's very clear that the strict Biblical guidance for eldership is by no means superfluous. One of the qualifications of an overseer, for example, is 'able to teach' (I Timothy 3:2). James writes that anyone who presents himself as a teacher of the people of God bears heavy responsibility: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1, Jeremiah 23). By his brethren and by Jesus!

Everyone, but especially those in positions of leadership in the assembly, is directly answerable to Jesus Christ for his conduct, and for what he teaches. Now that could be more scary than answering to a mere man or group of men!

But scrutiny by the church at large is essential for maintaining order and guarding against heresy (for example, III John 10). It's noteworthy that assemblies and individual brethren often separate and isolate themselves. They reject commonly held teachings and do not submit their doctrinal innovations for the greater church to judge. Such vanities are a major cause of division in the church of God.

What We Must Do

Given the heavy charge laid by God on the local church leadership, it's vital that all brethren be vigilant to ensure that anyone appointed to any church office is fully equipped for that work. All of us need careful vigilance to ensure that the leadership of our assembly is of top quality and fulfills the Bible criteria. A checklist based on the Biblical guidance is a must. Probing questions must be asked before an appointment is made and without embarrassment!

Too often a candidate for appointment to a church office can be superficially plausible. He may have a pleasing personality, be well-liked in his assembly, be 'academic' and perhaps the richest or smartest. Such qualities can blind the brethren to his real motives. Hence the value of external scrutiny! It doesn't guarantee a good appointment, but it does help us to avoid costly error (Acts 20:30-31).

Respect Your Elders!

On the other hand, with such a burden of responsibility on elders, it's not surprising that the inspired Scriptures urge the brethren to support them. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).

The inspired writer continues: "Obey your leaders and be submissive. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (v. 17). Paul adds: "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you and are over you in the Lord and who admonish [counsel] you. Hold them in highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other" (I Thessalonians 5:12, 13).

The purpose is not to elevate the leadership on a pedestal - but simply to ensure a proper environment in which they can exercise their responsibilities.

For some reason many brethren find it painful to accept these clear instructions from Jesus Christ!

There can be no Biblical argument for thinking that leadership within an assembly of Christians is superfluous. What is unbiblical is men and women (whether officially 'appointed' or not) lording it over the flock for personal advantage whether financial or to deliberately undermine the faith or for personal power and influence. What is unbiblical is a local assembly torn by indecision and doctrinal squabbles through lack of, or lack of voluntary submission to, a qualified leadership and focused inwardly rather than fulfilling the role for which Jesus Christ has raised it up.

So - maintain vigilance. An assembly that's at peace with itself and willingly subject to wise and compassionate leadership is an assembly well fitted to fulfill its assigned work for the Savior locally, and within the wider Body of Christ.

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See James McBride's other articles at:

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That is a good question! Who exactly should we welcome into our fellowship? Should we fellowship with just anyone? Should we limit it to those who exactly share our opinions of what scripture means? Should our fellowship be confined to those who attend our own group? Or should we expand that fellowship to those who are of other groups? How would we know if someone thought and believed as we do, anyway? What makes any one of us believe that we have the correct understanding of all things, or anything, for that matter? What do we do if a person with whom we have been fellowshiping suddenly seems to have beliefs that do not coincide with our own?

For the answer to these questions, we must surrender our own ideas to the clear teachings of Jesus Christ. We are to fellowship; therefore, we must know if any guidelines have been given to us. One guideline we are given can be found in Ephesians 5:11, which says, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."* (NKJ throughout, unless stated differently).

Those who are engaging in works of darkness are to be avoided. Does that mean someone who stumbles and commits a sin? In 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 it is stated, *"And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. (15) Yet do not count him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother."* Paul, in this instance, was talking about some who were not working but were spending their time in activities that burdened the congregation. Paul used the example of how he had worked with his own hands and did not burden the congregation when he was there. Clearly, if one refuses to work but, instead, burdens the congregation with meddling in things that are none of that one's concern, that brother should be admonished, and then we refuse fellowship.

We certainly cannot admonish a brother with whom we have no fellowship! But, if such a one is sinning, we should admonish him or her, and then not keep company until they repent. This would go hand-in-hand with avoiding those who are engaged in "works of darkness." As a brother (or sister) we ought to admonish one who is caught in a sin (assuming of course that we have first-hand knowledge of the sin) but avoid fellowship until such is cleared up! We are not to consider them as enemies of the Way, as scripture clearly states. In effect, we shun the one who is in sin, once we have admonished them—assuming that they recognize that they are sinning.

But notice what else God says to us about sinners! In I John 5:16-17 we are instructed, *"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death."* We ought to be praying for that brother caught up in the sin! Certainly, we should not fellowship with them, but we must also be praying for them! The inference is that our prayers can be useful in causing a brother to be restored to life! Notice also that the sin is one of which we have first-hand knowledge--we actually saw the sin!

Is there anyone else with whom we should not have fellowship? An answer to this question is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14, where it is stated, *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?"* Unfortunately, this scripture has long been abused to mean that we should avoid all who are not of our own group, organization or congregation. That idea is a perversion of this scripture. How do we know this? Continue reading in verse 15: *"And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what*

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part has a believer with an unbeliever?” This verse is talking about avoiding fellowship with unbelievers, and in particular unbelievers who are associated with Belial—a condition completely foreign to the presence of God! This is *not* talking about those who keep as many of the commandments as they truly believe that they are supposed to keep.

Therefore, we should be fellowshiping with believers then! Who is a believer? What should they believe? How do we know that they are a believer? Where will we find a definition so plain as to enable us to find a believer? Perhaps if we look to this scripture, we can find some initial direction. 1 Tim 2:3-4 shows us, “... *God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” It looks like we consider all men to be worthy of fellowship, initially, since God desires them all to come to the knowledge of the truth!

But, if we do that, how do we begin to narrow down that list to those with whom we really ought to have fellowship? The truth is, we do not know who it is we should be fellowshiping with until we get to know them! That is how we can see what it is that they believe. That entails, being friendly! Therefore, step one is: be friendly.

What is the next step? We should look at the words of Christ when He told us who his mother and brothers were. He said, “*And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother,*” in Matt 12:49-50. Obviously one who is doing the will of the Father will not be engaged in works of darkness! At least now we have the beginning of a standard by which we can find those with which we should fellowship! It is someone who is doing the will of the Father—at least as much as that one understands it. Attitude is everything!

What is the will of the Father? Whole books have been written on that subject. However, let us boil it down to a few items that can give us direction in our search for God’s will. First, our fellowship ought to be with one who keeps the Commandments of God. Secondly, that person ought to have the testimony of Jesus Christ. What scriptures can we find in support of those basic standards? We find in Revelation 12:17 this statement: “*And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*”

There is an old proverb that states that the enemy of my enemy is my friend! Whoever the dragon, or Satan, is going off to make war with, could be described as one with whom we would want fellowship. They are those who keep the Commandments and accept Jesus Christ.

We should have fellowship with those who worship and obey the very God we do, and who accept the sacrifice of His Son. That is a pretty wide-ranging field. Does that exclude those who keep only nine of the ten commandments? Of course not! Those excluded are those who reject the commandments of God—or refuse to quit a sin, as we have already seen. We will find that there are precious few of those types of people!

Is there any in the community of believers with whom we should not have fellowship? This author could not find in scripture any believer, who is not actively engaging in some sin of which we are aware personally, with whom we should not allow ourselves to fellowship! We know that sin is defined for us in I John 3:4, where it says, “*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law*” (KJV). Our fellowship, therefore, is neatly rolled into one simple definition for us. We fellowship with those who are actively seeking the obedience to God—as much as they know to do!

What of those who sincerely believe that the Sabbath is done away, but keep all the other commandments? God knows the sincerity of their heart. It is not our job to convict them; it is our job to love them. They are a subject for fellowship, certainly. How else will they see the beauty of complete obedience to the Laws of God?

Some have said that we should not fellowship with those outside of our own congregational groups, or corporate entities. When we appeal to scripture, where do we find such a command? We don’t. The truth of scripture is that, unless people are in active rebellion against the Most High God, and His Laws, we can and should consider them brethren—current or potential—and we should fellowship with them as we have opportunity.

What about the Holy Days listed in Leviticus 23? If some don’t keep these days, should we avoid them as sinners? How are we to judge what God has revealed to anyone? The truth is that nobody has the complete truth of the Way of God,

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and that we will all stand on our own, before the Throne of Judgment, to answer for what we did with what we knew! We will not be called into judgment for what someone else did or did not know! Our judgment will be for what we were given to understand. It is written in Romans 14:10-13, *"But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (11) For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (12) So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. (13) Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way"* (emphasis author's).

We should consider all men in such a way that we do not put a stumbling block in their way. When we engage in argument, and cast doubts on the conversion of others, just because they do not hold the exact same beliefs as we do, we judge them, and by our own attitude, could put a block in front of them that could cause them to doubt the very faith that God has given them. Such would be a grave sin against our brother! We would be boasting in our knowledge: such boasting is arrogance and is evil (James 4:16)!

Differences in doctrine are not reasons to avoid fellowshiping with anyone. In truth, our similarities far outweigh our differences. Instead, we should look out for the welfare of each other. We should seek the best for each other and pray for the peace and safety of each other. Let us pray that the Gospel of Christ would be furthered by our individual efforts, and that our combined efforts would be successful in bringing many sons to glory!

If we join hands in doing the work of our Father, as Christ Himself said He was to do, then we can rest assured that our ways will indeed be pleasing to God. We have many brethren, scattered amongst many denominations, who desire to keep His Laws and have His Spirit. We likewise have many friends who live lives in compliance with all of the commandments, save one. It is up to us to decide whether or not we will accept all of those children as brethren. It is up to us whether or not we will honor the command of God to maintain the same love, unity in spirit and purpose, with these children. Instead of looking at the ways we differ, let us instead look at how we can be united in love, doing His will, setting the proper example for all, including those who don't yet keep all of His commandments.

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The Ministry of a Watchman
(Copyright 2023) by Sunil Poonen (San Jose, California)

Have you ever wondered what the most used application on your laptop is? What about the most used device in your home? I'm sure there are many right answers but here are my "riddle answers". My answer to the first question is "your virus scan software". It's constantly running in the background without your knowledge to make sure your data, files, and content are not compromised by invisible malware. Similarly, my answer to the second question is "your security system or your smoke detector". Even if your internet is down or lights are off, your smoke detector is constantly testing the air in your home for smoke particles that might signal a fire or carbon monoxide that might be lethally poisonous. Your security system is also monitoring constantly for unwanted intruders. Similar to the virus-scanner, the smoke detector, and a security system, there is one ministry especially in the home that is invisible, overlooked and often neglected - the ministry of the watchman.

Being a watchman is not just a calling for the elders in the church. It is even more relevant to us as fathers, mothers, husbands, and wives as we seek to raise godly households and families in the fear of the Lord. Just like a security guard or night watchman or security system, we must be on high alert for anything that compromises the home. Matthew 13:24-27 - *Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who*

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sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and left. And when the wheat sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also became evident. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ The enemy is eager to plant small “weeds” of compromise in my home that conform to the world that will choke the good seed that the Lord has planted already. I must be alert and not asleep to the schemes of the enemy lest after my children are grown up, I question the Lord asking Him about how these “weeds” showed up when He had planted good seed. Spiritually speaking, these “weeds” could be what is being accessed or viewed on the internet or TV or phones - even that which might be seemingly harmless and not sinful but yet gradually eroding the purity of the home. But more importantly, like monoxide, there could be more invisible and harmless looking “weeds” that an alert spiritual “watchman” should be aware of - attitudes of complaining and grumbling, disputing and arguing, unkind words between husband and wife or between siblings, a scoffing attitude of condescension in jokes towards other family members, a tone of accusation and blame, casual disobedience to parents, delayed obedience, disrespect in responses to parents, rude conversation that puts another sibling down and doesn’t uplift, boastful pride in one’s achievements in school, sport or play, an attitude of self-pity, doubt and unbelief, the love of money and the pursuit of earthly glory and ambition accompanied by earthly heroes, etc. As a “watchman” over my family, I must constantly be on the alert to root out the “weeds” of these sins the moment I notice them.

The Lord has called us to be especially alert as we see the day of His coming drawing near. In the parable of the ten virgins, it says that even the five wise virgins got drowsy and fell asleep when the bridegroom was delaying (Matthew 25:5) and had to trim their lamps only on His arrival (Matthew 25:7). The Lord has a higher calling for us even more so than the five wise virgins. *Luke 12:35-37, 42-43 - “Be prepared, and keep your lamps lit. You are also to be like people who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door for him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; ... And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.”* Will the Lord find me faithful and sensible with my lamp lit and looking out for the ones who He has asked me to be on watch for - providing them their rations and oil in the form of prayer, encouragement, and discipline so that their own lamps are well-lit?

I can easily deceive myself by saying this doesn’t apply to me as a new covenant Christian as I couldn’t possibly be spiritually drowsy. After all, I am involved weekly in the church and I have an intimate personal relationship with the Lord. But here are a few tests to see whether I am a drowsy watchman when it comes to my own family:

- If I enjoy the fellowship with and ministering to the church more than I enjoy the fellowship with and serving and encouraging my spouse and children, then I am indeed a drowsy and distracted watchman over them.
- If I value my child’s academic GPA over their “spiritual GPA” - for example, if I am more disturbed by their results in an academic test or exam than I am by their lack of immediate obedience or their unkind words or their boastful pride - then I am a drowsy watchman.
- Will I be willing to cheer and rejoice louder when I see their obedience, humility in serving at home, kind speech to siblings, and the Lord at work in them than when they score a goal or get a good test score or get into a good college or when their earthly talents are on display or when they are appreciated by others in the church?
- Will I pride myself in their nice-sounding prayers and ignore their complaining and argumentative attitude, unkind words, and disobedience? After all isn’t it the answer to their prayers that I must rejoice in and not the prayer in itself?

But as a watchman, how can I be equipped for this immense responsibility of staying alert at all times? Unlike a physical watchman who trains his eyes (among his five senses) for compromise, the role of the spiritual watchman starts with first listening. Not listening for the invasion or threat, but rather listening to God. *Habakkuk 2:1,2 says “I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved. Then the Lord answered me and said, “Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run.”* I must stand on guard in my watchtower of prayer, not to identify

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faults in my family on my own, but to identify the Lord and hear His voice and to be ready to take His reproof and correction. Any weakness or failure in any member of my family IS MY weakness and failure (2 Corinthians 11:29). What the Lord speaks to me is meant to be recorded in my heart and shared with others (my family members) so that we can together put aside the encumbrance that is tripping us up and run the race together (Hebrews 12:1). And as Habakkuk 2:3 says, I must be willing to wait on the Lord in persistence to hear from Him. In this context of being a watchman that waits on the Lord, it says the famous words in verse 4 - *“the righteous shall live by faith”*.

Once I have learned to listen for the Lord, He desires to equip me as a watchman to use my mouth and my heart to respond. Isaiah 62:6,7 - *“On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; And give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”* I must see the Lord’s appointment of me as a watchman for my spouse and children as a heavenly calling. That calling mandates that I must not stay silent, and I must remind the Lord in prayer until He establishes my family for His praise. Verse 1 of the same chapter says, *“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning.”* Replace “Zion” and “Jerusalem” with your spouse or children’s names. In my case, I want to say to the Lord, “I will not keep silent Lord, I will not rest - for Zachary’s sake, for Kainan’s sake, for Leanna’s sake, for Micah’s sake - until their righteousness goes forth like brightness; not until I see just the dawn of Your light in their life, but persistently until their brightness is like the noonday sun” (Prov 4:18). Like the parable of the man knocking on his friend’s door at midnight on behalf of the hunger of his other friend (Luke 11:5-13), I must be persistent in asking, seeking and knocking on behalf of my family, that they will grow in their intimacy with the Lord, that they will understand the immensity of His love as their Father, that they will be filled and overflowing with His Holy Spirit to be equipped as a disciple and to bless others.

Finally, the most effective watchman is the one who is humble and needy and recognizes their complete hopelessness in their ability to be a loving spouse and watchful parent yet has complete confidence in God to meet that need. It is the one who realizes their own striving, parenting skills and techniques, earthly love for their spouse, etc. are all in vain unless the Lord is the one building their home. *Psalms 127:1 Unless the Lord builds a house, they who build it labor in vain; unless the Lord guards a city, the watchman stays awake in vain.* The Lord has promised He will keep the needy one secure and will shut out all unrighteousness. Not only this, He has promised that others around me will see it and be blessed and rejoice. *Psalms 107:41,42 - But He sets the needy securely on high, away from affliction and makes his families like a flock. The upright see it and are glad; but all unrighteousness shuts its mouth.*

See Sunil Poonen’s other articles at:

[Poonen, Sunil – Church of God, Bismarck \(church-of-god-bismarck.org\)](http://church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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Counterfeit Revival
(Copyright 2023) by Zac Poonen (Bangalore, India)

Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warned that the last days would be characterized by widespread deception and a multitude of false prophets (Matt. 24:3-5, 11, 24; 1 Tim. 4:1) – and we have seen plenty of them in the last few decades.

“Jesus is the Mediator of a NEW covenant and HE is our Example and the Author of our faith today – not David or Elijah.”

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Why are millions of Christians deceived by these false prophets and these counterfeit “revivals”? And why are so many preachers falling prey to immorality and greed?

Here are some of the main causes:

1. Most Christians today are not aware of what the New Testament teaches, because they have not studied it carefully; and so, they follow the teachings of their leaders and not the teachings of the New Testament.
2. Miracles (supernatural gifts) have become more important to them than their character (a godly life).
3. Material wealth has become more important to them than spiritual wealth.
4. They are unable to distinguish between soulish frenzy or psychological manipulation, and the genuine moving of the Holy Spirit. The cause for this again is ignorance of the New Testament.
5. They are unable to distinguish between psychosomatic healing (healing that comes by right attitudes of the mind), and supernatural healing in Jesus' name.
6. Emotional excitement and strange physical manifestations have become more important to them than the inward joy of the Lord.
7. For the leaders, their ministry to people has become more important than their inner walk with God.
8. The approval of men has become more important to these leaders than the approval of God.
9. The number of people attending the meetings has become more important to these leaders than whether those people are totally committed to Christ.
10. Building their personal kingdoms and their financial empires have become more important to these leaders than building a local church and making themselves servants in that local church *“From the least of them to the greatest, everyone is greedy for gain; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. (Jeremiah 6:13).*

All this is the VERY OPPOSITE of what Jesus taught. The opposite of Christ is called the “anti-Christ” in the New Testament. If Christians do not see this clearly, then when the Antichrist turns up on the world’s stage, with his false signs and wonders (2 Thess.2:3-10), they too will blindly accept him. To be led by the Spirit of Christ is to have the very opposite spirit to that mentioned in the points above.

Here is a paraphrase of Jesus’ words in *Matthew 7:13-27* (read in the context of *Matthew Chapters 5 to 7*):

“Both the gate and the way to ETERNAL LIFE are very narrow – as I have just described (Matthew 5 to 7). But false prophets will come along and tell you that the gate and way are not narrow but easy and broad. Beware of them. You will be able to identify them easily by observing the fruit of their character: Do they live a life free from anger, free from lusting after women, free from the love of money and free from anxiously seeking after material wealth (as worldly people seek)? Do they preach against these things as I have done here? (Matt.5:21-32 and 6:24-34). These false prophets may exercise many supernatural gifts and do miracles and actually heal people in My name, but I will still send them all to hell in the final day, because they did not know Me (as THE HOLY ONE) and they did not give up sin in their private lives (Matt.7:21-23). So, if you want to build a church on a rock that will never shake or fall in time or eternity, be careful to do all that I have just spoken to you (Matt. 5 to 7) and teach your people to do all that I have commanded you too. Then I will be with you always and My authority will always back you (Matt.28:20, 18). But if you only hear what I say and don’t do it, then what you build may look like a large and impressive church to men, but it will surely crumble and fall one day (Matt.7:27).”

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How then shall we build an unshakeable church in these last days?

1. We must live the sermon on the mount (*Matthew 5 to 7*) and preach it constantly.
2. We must live in the new covenant and not in the old covenant. For this, we must know the difference between the two covenants clearly (*2 Cor. 3:6*). We must also preach the new covenant.

When preachers fall into serious sin today, they justify themselves by (and find their comfort in) the examples of Old Testament saints who also fell into sin. And then they re-commence their ministry after a period of silence. They quote the examples of David who committed adultery, and Elijah who got depressed, and they say, "But God still used them"! But they won't quote the example of Paul who lived in victory and purity until the end of his life.

What these preachers (and most Christians) have not seen is that the Old Testament saints are NOT our examples today. We have been given much more in this age of grace – and "*to whom more is given, more is required*" (*Luke 12:48*). Jesus is the Mediator of a NEW covenant, and HE is our Example and the Author of our faith today – not David or Elijah. The distinction between the Old Testament saints (listed in *Hebrews 11*) and Jesus, is made very clear in *Hebrews 12:1-4*. But very few live in the reality of this. Very few have seen that "*God has provided something BETTER for us*" in the new covenant (*Heb. 11:40*).

Any of us can fall in the way that many preachers have fallen if we are not watchful and alert – for Satan is a cunning enemy. Our safety lies in obeying New Testament teaching exactly and in submitting to godly leadership. (And by "godly" leadership, I mean those who do not have even one of the wrong values listed in the ten points I mentioned earlier). If we learn from the mistakes of others, we can avoid making the same mistakes ourselves.

So let us keep our faces in the dust before the Lord at all times – for it is there that we will receive Divine revelation, as John did (*Rev. 1:17*). If we humble ourselves, we will receive grace to be overcomers (*1 Pet. 5:5*). And when the Holy Spirit shows us the truth in God's Word and the truth about ourselves, let us be totally honest and "*love the truth, so as to be saved*" from all sin. That way we will be protected by God Himself from all deception (*2 Thess. 2:10,11*). Amen.

See Zac Poonens other articles at:

Poonen, Zac – Church of God, Bismarck (church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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Building the True Church
(Copyright 2023) by Santosh Poonen (Bangalore, India)

I have heard my Dad (Zac Poonen) use this illustration to show the difference between the Old Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit and the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit: In the Old Covenant, man's heart was like a cup with a lid on it (like the veil that closed up the Most Holy Place in the Jewish temple). The Holy Spirit was poured out on this closed lid of the cup, and He flowed over it in rivers of blessing to multitudes around - as He did through Moses, John the Baptist, etc.

"Just fall into the ground and die to yourself."

But in the New Covenant, the lid is removed (*2 Corinthians 3:12-18*). This was symbolized by the veil in the temple being rent when Jesus died, and the way into the Most Holy Place being opened up. Now, when the Spirit is poured out, He

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fills the cup first - cleanses the believer's heart first - and then flows out “from his innermost being” in blessing to multitudes, as Jesus explained in John 7:37-39. This is how the New Covenant Church is built.

If we are still trying to *use* the Holy Spirit only to preach to others, then we will only build a *Congregation* or a *Club*. But if we allow God to fill us and shed abroad His love in our hearts first of all, then He can flow from our *innermost being* to others. Then we will build the Church with others who also have the same spirit of fellowship. Love for God and for others will overflow from our hearts, and true unity of the spirit will be built through each of us taking up the cross.

In reality, the true Church is built up *primarily* when we are **away** from each other. It is *not* built only when we gather together at our Sunday meetings. Yes, it is built there through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But it is built even more so when we are away from each other. When we are being tempted in some way - to be dishonest, or to be angry, or to lust with our eyes, etc. - that's where you prove whether you are part of Jesus' Church. In these temptations, if we take up our cross, die to ourselves, preserve our devotion to the Lord, and resist sin, then we walk in the light and have fellowship with the Lord. Then, when we meet together with each other, *we will have real fellowship with each other (1 John 1:7).*

Colossians 2:2 speaks about our hearts being “*knit together in love*”. I cannot knit myself to others, in love. Only the Holy Spirit can do this work of knitting our hearts together. If, however, I try to knit my heart to yours in some human way, by giving you gifts, or by spending time with you, etc., I will only build a *Club*. But God says, “Just die to yourself”. When I do that, the *Holy Spirit* will do the work of knitting my heart in an invisible, supernatural way, with the others among whom He has placed me in a local church, who are also dying to themselves.

Our fellowship will then become sweet - not because we believe the same doctrines or sing the same songs, but because we have both fallen into the ground and died to our Self-life. We come into fellowship with each other, thus, through the Holy Spirit.

Any unity that we have, without dying to Self, will only result in *friendship*, and not true Christian *fellowship*. Fellowship is a spiritual thing, but friendship is an earthly thing.

The people in the world have *friendship*. The members of many worldly clubs have a lot of close friendship with each other and care for each other deeply. But they can never have true *fellowship* - because that is a spiritual work that only the Holy Spirit can do in our lives. When God sees any child of His “*bearing the dying of Jesus in his body*”, He rewards him by giving him something more of “*the life of Jesus*” (*2 Corinthians 4:10, 11*). It is this “*life of Jesus*” within two believers that brings true fellowship between them. And with such people God builds His New Covenant Church.

When I began to see these truths, I stopped asking the Lord, “Lord, where are the people who want to build Your true Church?” I realized that God would find them and bring us together - if I myself was first willing to fall into the ground and die. If I refused to die, then God would not bring them to me.

Trying to find wholehearted believers around us is like trying to find “*needles in a haystack*”. We could spend many years searching in the pile of hay for those tiny needles in that pile; and perhaps find one needle after many years of effort. But the Lord says, “Don't waste your time looking for those needles. I know where they are. Just fall into the ground and die to yourself.” Then the life of Jesus in you will become such a powerful magnet, that it will draw those “*needles*” (wholehearted disciples) out” (*John 1:4, 12:32*).

Other believers who are also seeking to live a godly life and to build the New Covenant Church will be drawn to you and to the message of the cross that you proclaim. That is God's way. He brings the wholehearted ones to us. “*All whom the Father gives Me will come to Me*”, Jesus said in *John 6:37*. And the Father will do the same for us too. That is how we build the New Covenant Church.

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Insight from Paul (Copyright 2022) by James McBride (United Kingdom)

The apostle Paul’s letters shed a bright light on our walk with God.

Our world is fast becoming the mirror image of the world of the apostle. Like that world we attend to our daily lives as best we can despite the stranglehold of red tape, of petty authoritarian interference and the pressures of a self-centered society.

As Christians, Paul says, we must be prepared to ‘...suffer tribulation [Gk.thlipsis] and persecution [Gk diogmos]’. That is, *pressure, trouble, affliction, burdens, and persecution*. He spoke from personal experience! (II Corinthians 11:23, 29).

We are, however, in the loving care of our great God, our heavenly Father, who monitors our every woe: ‘...[God] will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it’ (I Corinthians 10:13). And ‘...If God be for us, who can be against us?’

All too often we need that escape route from trouble—though our problems are often caused by our neglect of God’s principles for living, the remedy for which can be found in His Word through our diligent study.

The added imminent external pressures— energy, high living costs *etc.*—can test our trust in His provision of our daily needs. But we are assured of His care, as Elijah told the widow; ‘... thus says the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth’ (I Kings 17:14). Recall how He fed Israel with the *manna* for forty years, protected them from the sun, provided water, and fed Elijah by ravens.

We are comforted by the words of the apostle: “...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit.’

See James McBride’s other articles at:
[McBride, James – Church of God, Bismarck \(church-of-god-bismarck.org\)](http://church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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It Worked Last Time (Copyright 2023) by Rich Traver (Clifton, Colorado)

Someone sent me this. Hopefully, it's bunk, but they ARE getting pretty desperate. Society in large part fell for it last time, and that facilitated many aspects of the sinister agenda against we the people. We now know that the panic conditions were hugely ramped-up.

Predictions of massive numbers of victims, that proved to be totally made-up and false.

It's now being admitted in numerous ways and places. Ivermectin is now OK to prescribe. And other reverses and admissions.

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Keep in mind, the reason for banning ivermectin / hydroxychloroquine was to allege that there was NO OTHER treatment available, so that they could impose the vax mandate without the normally required clinical testing.

We now know that the virus was manufactured, as are the others that are waiting in the wings.

Question at this point is whether the Vaxx for this 'variant' is already invented, ready, and if it's really any good.

If so, it reflects on a long-term program of planning. That alone should ring alarm bells if so.

The thing with this announcement is the timing. Think FoT (Feast of Tabernacles) and our being restricted for some cockamamie reason AGAIN.

Yes, what they concocted last time was a real concern, was effective and transmissible, but they were disappointed that it didn't live up to expectations. It was contagious, but way less lethal than they'd hoped for.

What if the hotel venues get panicky resulting from 'legal concerns'? That's always a tool they use.

<https://www.infowars.com/posts/exclusive-biden-admin-preparing-to-bring-back-full-covid-restrictions-rollout-to-begin-mid-september/>

See Rich Traver's other articles at:

Traver, Rich – Church of God, Bismarck (church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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Keys

(Copyright 2023) by Gary C. Miller (Pocahontas, Arkansas)



THE KEYS TO YOUR FUTURE ARE IN YOUR HANDS

"Often times it happens we live our lives in chains and never even know **We** have the **Key**." (Eagles, 1974)

ASK:

"And all things, whatsoever you shall **Ask** in Prayer (Speak It),

Believing, you shall Receive." (Matt. 21:22)

"...**Ask**, and you Shall Receive..." (Jn. 16:24)

GIVE:

"**Give** and it shall be given to you; good measure...running over, shall men **Give** into your bosom..." (Lk. 6:38)

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SEEK, KNOCK:

“...**Seek**, and you shall Find; **Knock** and it shall be Opened...” (Lk. 11:9) May have to Seek and Knock many times.

SPEAK, BELIEVE, DOUBT NOT:

“...and shall **Not Doubt** in his heart but shall Believe that those things which he **Says** shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he **Says**.” (Mk. 11:23).

“Therefore I say to you, What things soever you desire, when you **Pray** (*Speak It*), **Believe**...you receive them, and you shall have them.” (Mark 11:24)

POEM ALSO TELLS THE STORY:

“I bargained with Life for a penny, And Life would pay no more, However I begged at evening When I counted my scanty store.

“For Life is a just employer,

He gives you what you Ask,

But once you have set the wages, Why, you must bear the task.

“I worked for a menial’s hire, Only to learn, dismayed,

That any wage, I had Asked of Life,

Life would have willingly paid.” (Author unknown)

See Gary Miller’s other articles at:

Miller, Gary C. – Church of God, Bismarck (church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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<http://www.icyahweh.org/>

The Josiah Manifesto
(2023) Sent by James Steinle (Swanville, Minesota)

Jonathan Cahn & Steve Quayle 9-29-23

Where we are at in the history of America and the world

https://qfiles.tv/programs/0561-jonathan-cahn-steve-quayle-9-29-23-fe380a?category_id=25758

Strongly encourage everyone to watch. Eye opening happenings and revelations!

See James Steinle’s other articles at:

Steinle, James – Church of God, Bismarck (church-of-god-bismarck.org)

Iron Sharpening Iron

New American Standard Bible (Proverbs 27:17)
As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

In regard to: Azazel: Observations and Questions

Article by Pat Higgins
Comments by Dave Rothwell (St. Joseph, Missouri)

The message below is in response to the idea that both goats in Leviticus 16 represent Jesus.

The doctrine that the two goats in Leviticus 16 both represent Jesus is not "new understanding." It is neither new, nor does it represent a correct understanding. It is a fundamental misunderstanding. There are two major flaws with the Both Goats Are Jesus doctrine.

The first flaw is simply a contradiction in logic. If both goats represented Jesus, then there would have been no need to cast lots. Either goat would have fit the typology for the sacrificed goat or the banished goat. The reason that lots were cast is that it was impossible for the High Priest or the people to know which goat represented Jesus. As we are told in Scripture, Satan is transformed as an angel of light and has deceived the whole world. God must show us who the true Messiah is. Prior to God healing our spiritual blindness and opening our eyes, we did not know the true Messiah. We followed the false god of this world. That is the symbolism of the casting of the lots. God must show us who is the true God and who is the false god.

The second flaw centers around the commonly believed doctrine that Jesus bore the guilt for our sins. This belief was espoused by Martin Luther. Luther wrote that Jesus, at the time of the crucifixion, became "the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, and blasphemer, that ever was or could be in the world." Blasphemy? Quite possibly, but that is what is taught in Protestant theology. And sadly, it is what is commonly believed in the COG groups as well. The COG groups do not state it as bluntly as did Martin Luther, but they nevertheless teach that Jesus bore the guilt for our sins. But is that true?

Could God have taken the guilt for the sins of mankind and transferred it to Jesus? How is this even possible? The very definition of the word guilt tells us that it is not possible. Guilt, by definition, is non-transferable. Guilt is defined as the state of having committed an offense. It means you did it. It is the opposite of innocence. A man is either guilty or innocent. He either sinned or he didn't. And if he didn't sin, then he cannot be guilty. Does anyone make the argument that Jesus sinned?

In our man-made, so-called justice systems, judges and juries sometimes convey a guilty verdict upon an innocent man. But when that happens it doesn't make the innocent guilty. It is simply a miscarriage of justice. Sometimes it happens out of ignorance, and sometimes it happens as the result of corruption. But God is neither ignorant nor corrupt.

There are no miscarriages of justice in God's court. God is a righteous judge. He is a God of justice. "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face" (Psalm 89:14). God will not convey a guilty verdict upon a righteous man.

But what about passages like 2 Corinthians 5:21 (For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him) and Isaiah 53:6 (All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all)? Don't they prove that Jesus bore the guilt of our sin? Let's take a look.

Yes, Jesus was made to be sin for us; and, yes, God laid on Him our sins. But what does that mean? Are these passages to be taken in a literal sense? Was Jesus literally changed into sin; and did God literally place our sins on His back?

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Sin is an action (1 John 3:4, sin is the transgression of the law); or it is the idea of that action. A person cannot literally be transformed into an action or an idea. Nor can a person literally have an action or idea placed on his back. So, clearly, these passages are metaphors.

A metaphor is a figure of speech. For example, the phrase, "You're pushing my buttons," does not imply the existence of any literal buttons, or even any literal fingers doing any literal pushing, for that matter.

So what do the metaphors in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Isaiah 53:6 mean? Clearly, something of sin was applied to Jesus. But what was that something? Was it the guilt for our sin? Or was it the penalty for our sin? The only answer that makes any sense is that Jesus bore the penalty for our sin.

Jesus cannot be made guilty for our sin. He has committed no sin. Nor does He play any part in the sins we commit. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13).

But Jesus can step forward and volunteer to take upon Himself the penalty for our sin. That is how Jesus was "made to be sin" for us, and how God "laid on Him" our sin. He paid the penalty for sin in our place.

In our justice system here in the United States, criminal cases are generally divided into two phases – the trial phase and the penalty phase. In the trial phase a judge or jury weighs the evidence and decides whether the accused committed the crime, and returns a verdict of guilty, or not guilty. The penalty phase is where sentencing takes place.

In the trial phase of God's court, we have all been found guilty. "For all have sinned..." (Romans 3:23). And because we were found guilty, we were all given the death penalty in the sentencing phase. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Imagine now that you have been convicted of a crime. You rob banks for a living, and you got caught. You were arrested, tried, and found guilty of armed robbery, a crime which carries a penalty of up to twenty-five years in prison. And you're about to be sentenced.

To continue the analogy, now imagine that someone volunteers to take your place. If a third party came forward and volunteered to serve your prison sentence for you, and if the judge allowed it, you would go free and have a chance to straighten out your life and quit robbing banks.

But the person who sacrificed himself to set you free would not be found guilty. He didn't rob the bank or have any part in it. He's just serving your sentence. You were found guilty, but he is paying your debt to society, so you're free to go, as if you hadn't committed the crime at all. That's what Jesus has done, and will do, for us (when we repent of sin).

Satan, however, is responsible for introducing sin into the world. Sin entered the world through Adam (Romans 5:12), and it was the Serpent -- who is Satan (Revelation 20:2) -- that influenced Adam to sin. He got to Adam through his wife, Eve, and thereby became an accomplice to mankind's first sin (Genesis 3:1-6).

And Satan is an accomplice to every sin that has been committed since then. Paul calls him "the prince of the power of the air" because his spirit permeates the whole world. Like air, it is invisible, but nonetheless it is a very real power to sway the minds of men to commit sin. "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

Paul calls those who live a life of sin "the children of disobedience," implying that they are the spiritual offspring of Satan. Elsewhere, other passages are more direct, plainly identifying Satan as the father of sin and the spiritual father of those who commit sin. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning... In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God..." (1 John 3:8, 10).

"Ye do the deeds of your father... Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8: 41, 44).

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Satan is an accomplice to, and has conspired in, every sin ever committed by mankind. And just as an accomplice to a crime can be found guilty in a court of law the same as if he were the one who actually committed the crime, Satan is guilty. He bears guilt for the sins of the whole world.

Satan's guilt is pictured in the Atonement ceremony God gave to the ancient nation of Israel. This ceremony is described in Leviticus 16. Once each year at the Atonement ceremony, the high priest cast lots upon two goats. The goat upon which the Lord's lot fell was slain as a sin offering (Leviticus 16: 5-9). The other goat was led away into the wilderness after having the sins of the people confessed over it and placed on its head! (verses 10, 20-21).

Clearly the goat that was sacrificed represented Jesus. That fact, to my knowledge, is not disputed by any Bible scholar. And just as clearly, the blood of that goat was shed to symbolize the payment for the penalty of sin. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).

But the other goat, the live goat, wasn't slain. It did not bear the penalty of sin for the people. But it was led away into the wilderness where it bore "all the iniquities" of the people" (verse 22). If this goat was not made to bear the penalty of sin, then what of sin did it bear? Obviously, it bore guilt for the sins of the people.

So why would anyone think that Jesus bore the guilt for our sins? Plainly, the guilt was born, not by the goat that was slain as a sin offering, but by the live goat. If this live goat pictured Satan, as many Bible scholars believe, then anyone who believes that Jesus bore the guilt for our sin is faced with a major problem. Some theologians attempt to get around this problem by claiming that both goats represented Jesus.

But where in the symbolism that was acted out with the live goat is there anything of Christ? Clearly, the slain goat is a picture of Jesus' death. So, does the live goat represent the life of the risen Christ? If so, how can being led out to solitary exile in the wilderness represent the risen Christ in heaven sitting at the right hand of the Father? Was God's throne symbolized by a wilderness? No! God's throne was symbolized by the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies.

Is Christ in exile? No! Satan is the one who will be exiled. The exile of the live goat in the wilderness symbolized Satan's future. In the book of Revelation, we read that at the end of this age Satan will be bound and cast into a bottomless pit, where he can no longer influence people to sin (Revelation 20:1-3).

And who took the blood of the slain goat to the mercy seat within the Holy of Holies as a type of the risen Christ taking His own blood to God's throne in heaven (Hebrews 9:7-12)? Did the live goat do this? No, it was the high priest who did this. He represented the risen Christ in the Atonement ceremony. So how can the live goat represent the risen Christ? Clearly, it cannot!

Now if our guilt was not born by Jesus at the crucifixion, then much of what the COG groups teach about the crucifixion is called into question (as it should be). But that is a subject for another day.

In regard to: Azazel: Observations and Questions

Article by Pat Higgins
Comments by Laura Lee (Bismarck, North Dakota)

From Dave Rothwell's Iron Sharpening Iron:

The doctrine that the two goats in Leviticus 16 both represent Jesus is not "new understanding." It is neither new, nor does it represent a correct understanding.

Laura writes:

Just to clarify, the new doctrine I was talking about was in the first Iron Sharpening Iron where I asked why does the Goat of Departure have to represent Christ or Satan. In other words, maybe that goat represents neither.

The reason I say that is no one would think to lead Christ into the wilderness and just leave Him there. So, the Goat of

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Departure is not Christ. I also don't think that goat represents Satan for a few reasons. Satan is mentally ill and most mentally ill people don't know what sin is let alone to carry it into the wilderness.

Also remember the Goat of Departure was let go in the wilderness to wander alone. Satan wandering will just cause more problems for people since he would go wherever he wants to go because he is free.

I looked at a few things in regard to who this second goat is and apparently when Tyndale translated Azazel, he translated it as Escape Goat which is more in line with Goat of Departure. Later translators changed Escape Goat into Scapegoat which I believe is a bad translation. They really should have called it Escape Goat or Goat of Departure. In the end Satan will not be set free to wander the planet like he is doing right now. Satan will eventually be destroyed.

It seems to me that the live goat represents carrying sin away from the people. The live goat is symbolic of a future time when there will be no more sin. To me the true meaning of Atonement is to Atonement with God and to someday be totally free of sin forever.

In regard to: Building the True Church

Article by Santosh Poonen

Comments by Laura Lee (Bismarck, North Dakota)

From the article:

It is *not* built only when we gather together at our **Sunday meetings**.

Laura Lee writes:

First, I would like to say how really impressed I am with you and other members of your family. That you study your bibles is pretty clear, at least to me.

Of course, I have long known that the Sabbath you believe you should keep is Sunday. I used to also keep Sunday many years ago as did most of the people receiving this newsletter.

The Bible is a big book and there are many subjects to study in it and of course people generally study the subjects that really interest them first.

Most of us reading this newsletter now keep a Saturday Sabbath and the Annual Holy Days as scripture teaches us to do. As far as I know, there is no scripture anywhere in the bible that teaches us to keep a Sunday Sabbath. Also, to my knowledge there is no scripture in the bible that tells us that the Saturday Sabbath was changed to Sunday.

So, I am going to challenge you. Write me an article, using scripture from both the Old and New Testament proving that the Sabbath is Sunday or proving to me that the Saturday Sabbath has been changed to Sunday.

To help you study the subject, you can use the internet for information but remember you have to back it up with scripture from the bible. On our web site we also have many articles about the Sabbath. There is a “search” on our site, so just put Sabbath in there or Sunday and a few articles should show up.

When you are finished with your Saturday Sabbath or Sunday Sabbath article, send it to me and I will print it no matter what conclusion you come to. There is no rush, take your time.

In regard to: Counterfeit Revival

Article by Zac Poonen
Comments by Darwin & Laura Lee (Bismarck, North Dakota)

I will agree with you that there are many false preachers (teachers) out there now days, however if you know what your bible says, hopefully you will not be fooled by them.

Generally, I believe many of your articles are spot on, but this one, not so much.

The New Testament is just as important as the Old Testament or the Bible would not be considered the inspired word of God. What I don't understand is why so many people want to pretty much get rid of the Old Testament and build their entire belief system only around the New Testament. Maybe you have some insight on that.

Technically if you do not understand the Old Testament then you will never fully understand the New Testament because the Old Testament is the foundation of the New Testament. After all would you pick up a book other than the bible and read the last four chapters and tell yourself you don't have to read the first ten chapters because you have all you need to know from the last four chapters. Of course, you would not read any other book that way because you would not know what is going on or how they came to the conclusion they did in the last four chapters. So why do you study the most important book in the world that way?

God's law is in the Old Testament and that did not change with the New Testament. All of God's law is to be kept and the law is all still in effect except for the animal sacrifices which will be brought back in when Christ returns. That is talked about in Ezekiel. The first five books of the Old Testament are considered the books of the law.

In the New Testament, Christ himself says the following:

Mat 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. **Mat 5:18** For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

What law do you believe Christ is talking about here? He is talking about His Law and His Law is all listed in the Old Testament. There is nothing burdensome about the Law of God.

Here's the thing, Christ fulfilled the law by keeping it himself and by being crucified and resurrected for us so we can live. He did not die so we could continue to sin. What Christ did was take away the death penalty for sin. On this earth today there are people defunding the police and letting criminals out on the street. Do you see what happens when there is no law or anyone to enforce the law? People just go out and commit as many criminal offences as possible with little or no consequence. Read verse 18 where it clearly says, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law." Have heaven and earth gone anywhere or are they still here. If heaven and earth are still here then so is the Law of God still here.

All people sin, David was no different than Paul and Paul was no different than David in the area of sin.

The difference between the Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant) is that very few people were ever given God's Holy Spirit for one thing and even some that were only had it for a short time in order to fulfill something that God wanted done. God's Holy Spirit was given on the first Pentecost after Christ was resurrected. And even since then, it is only given to those that God is calling now. The Holy Spirit is what helps us keep the Law of God.

Another difference between the old and the new is that with the old if you murdered someone you committed a sin but with the new if you just think about murdering someone you have sinned. What the new covenant is, is made clear in Jeremiah 31:31-33.

Jer 31:31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and

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with the house of Judah: [Jer 31:32](#) Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: [Jer 31:33](#) But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Those who have God’s Holy Spirit will be keeping God’s Law which includes a Saturday Sabbath, and all the Annual Holy Days as listed in the Law of God in Leviticus 23. You will not find God’s people keeping Easter, Christmas or any of those Pagan Days which are a part of most of Christianity today.

I hope I have given you something to think about. Start at the beginning of your bible so you have the foundation for the New Testament when you get there and it will open up a whole new and wonderful world to you.

Holy Days 2024

Passover – April 23, 2024 (Observed at Sunset the Evening Before)

Passover/Unleavened Bread – April 23-29, 2024

Pentecost – June 12, 2024

Trumpets - October 3, 2024

Atonement – October 12, 2024

Tabernacles –October 17, 2024, to October 23, 2024

Last Great Day – October 24, 2024

Notes

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