



Nobility

**“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”
— Acts 17:11**

Bible Authority

The religious world largely ignores Biblical authority, choosing to live by the philosophy of human reason instead of what the Bible says. But what we do in religion must be authorized by the Bible, or it is sin. “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:17).

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To do a thing “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” means He has authorized us to do that thing. We cannot simply pick out a practice that suits us and say, “this is in the name of Christ.” Unless Christ has *authorized* what we preach and practice, we are *not* acting in his name. Jesus has *all* authority (Matthew 28:18), and for one’s religion to be right, his preaching and practice must be ordered by the word of Christ. To do otherwise brings God’s wrath upon us. “But though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

The silence of the Scriptures do not constitute religious authority. That philosophy says, “we can do anything in religion, so long as God didn’t say *not* to do it.” Two men in the Old Testament lost their lives because they did something which God hadn’t specifically forbidden. “Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he *commanded them not*. And there went out a fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord” (Leviticus 10:1-5).

They were authorized to offer incense in the tabernacle because they were the sons of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. Their offering had to be done “in the name of God” or by His authority. But the scripture says they offered *strange* fire which “God commanded

them *not*.” God had commanded the fire to be taken from the altar of incense which stood before the veil in the tabernacle. They reasoned that fire was fire, and its source was unimportant. That is true according to human reasoning. The fire they used would burn the incense as efficiently as the fire from the altar. But the principle involved is one of obedience to God’s expressed command.

As a result of following their own reasoning, they were killed. They may have been honest, reasoning that “God didn’t say *not* to use fire from another source.” The lesson is that when God specifies a certain thing, that excludes all else. These men are examples of modern thinkers who believe they can do anything in religion, so long as it isn’t specifically forbidden. That attitude violates Colossians 3:17 and 1 Peter 4:11.

While Nadab and Abihu lived by what God *didn’t say*, we have an example of a man who lived by what God *did say* and saved his family from destruction. In Genesis 6, God instructed Noah to build the ark. Specific instructions regarding its construction were given in Genesis 6:14-16. God specified a certain kind of wood — “gopher wood” — and gave the dimensions by which Noah was to construct the ark, and verse 22 says, “Thus did Noah according to *all that God commanded him*, so did he.” Noah could have reasoned — and rightly so — that “God *didn’t say not* to use pine or oak in the ark. But Noah understood a fundamental principle that we need to learn today. When God specifies a certain thing, that *excludes* everything else. God didn’t have to say, “*Don’t* use oak or pine.” His specification of gopher wood excluded all others. The silence of the Bible authorizes nothing. Man must live by what God has *said*, not by what He *didn’t say*.

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The Mission of Christ

Most people recognize Jesus Christ to be the greatest man to have ever walked upon the earth. Tragically, however, millions of people do not know His purpose in coming to this world though it is clearly revealed within the pages of the Bible.

When considering any mission, there are certain components. So it is with the mission of Christ. There must be one sent to a place. In this case, Christ Jesus was sent into this world (John 1:14; 1 Timothy 1:15). There must also be a sender. Jesus said the Father sent Him (John 4:34; 5:36; 6:38). And, there must be a purpose, a charge, an assignment. What purpose or mission did Christ serve?

Christ's Mission Was to Save. While Joseph contemplated his marriage with Mary, an angel came to him in a dream and proclaimed, "she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Later in His ministry, Jesus said, "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11). John, the apostle, wrote, "he was manifested to take away our sins" (1 John 3:5).

Christ's Mission Was to Minister. Jesus said, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus ministers by giving His life (1 Peter 1:18-19), by providing abundant life (John 10:10), and by being a merciful and faithful high priest (Hebrews 2:17). The greatest man was a servant. Let us follow His example.

Christ's Mission Was to Preach. Jesus told His disciples, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (Mark 1:38). During His lifetime, Jesus revealed His testament through His preaching which has been revealed to us though His apostles (Hebrews 9:16,17; John 14:26; Ephesians 3:5).

Christ's Mission Was to Judge. "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (John 9:39). While some accept the teachings of Jesus, others reject them and judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). As a lawgiver, Christ's words judge (John 12:48).

Christ's Mission Was to Destroy the Works of the Devil. John wrote, "...For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Jesus destroys sin and the punishment of sin, both of which are the works of Satan.

Christ's Mission Was to Fulfill the Law. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). He fulfilled the law by keeping it perfectly (Hebrews 5:8-9), by completing its purpose (Hebrews 10:9,10), and by carrying out the penalty of sin (Hebrews 7:27).

Christ's Mission Was to Establish His Kingdom. Jesus answered Pilate, "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world..." (John 18:37). Jesus' kingdom (church) was established on the day of Pentecost in AD 30, and He currently reigns in heaven over His church/kingdom (Acts 2:29-35; Colossians 1:13).

When Jesus came into the world, He had a mission. He did not aimlessly wander through life. His mission affects each one of us. We cannot just sit back and say what a wonderful mission. His mission ought to move us to fulfill our own mission to "Fear God, and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Chuck Northrop, Conway, AR

Christ Is the Head of the Church – Not You, I, or Peter!

Before being crucified on the cross for the sins of the world (**Matthew 26:28**), the Lord promised to build His church (**16:18**). After this event, Jesus told His apostles that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him (**28:18-20**). With that authority, He commanded the apostles to go into the entire world and preach the gospel (the message of salvation) and proper behaviors that must be applied in the church (cf. **Acts 8:5-12; 1 Timothy 3:15**).

The apostles of Jesus never possessed this level of authority, nor did they ever claim to be heads of the church. However, some teach that Jesus gave this position to the apostle Peter, making him the first pope. But that is just not the case. In regard to the church, Peter penned: "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in scripture, behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be put to shame" (**1 Peter 2:5-6**). His words demand our attention in this context. Not only does Peter confirm that Jesus is the chief cornerstone (not himself), but he also states that certain builders rejected Him as such. This has clear reference to the Christ who is the head of the corner, a stone of stumbling, and **rock** of offence (cf. **1 Peter 2:7-8**). Peter concisely concludes that we, as members of His church, are "living stones" but not the head corner stone. Because of those who presumptuously contend that Jesus told Peter he was this **rock**, a study of this context must include **Matthew 16:18-19**. If Peter claimed to be the rock, he would be contradicting the word of the Lord. Peter knew he was not the head of the church, but that the Lord was and is. Jesus promised to build His church, founded upon the bedrock of truth, which truth was expressed in the *confession* of Peter: "Thou art the Christ, the Son

of the living God" (**Matthew 16:16**). For this reason, Peter poignantly penned: "seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth..." and "for they stumble at the word, being disobedient..." (**1 Peter 1:22; 2:8**). Neither Peter nor the popes are the heads of the church. Christ is and always will be.

Concerning this idea, the apostle Paul wrote: "for other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (**1 Corinthians 3:11**). He further stated: "and He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence" (**Colossians 1:18**). And also: "far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and He [i.e. God the Father, - BRB] put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (**Ephesians 1:21-23**). Finally, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to relate the authority of the church to the divinely established authority of the home: "Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being the savior of the body. But, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything" (**Ephesians 5:22-24**).

There is only one head over the church. Christ is that head, and we must surrender to His authority. This authority is vested in His word, the Bible (**Colossians 3:16-17**). So the question now becomes, to whom have you surrendered, submitted, and pleaded for salvation (**Acts 2:37**)?

Bryan Braswell, Roanoke, TX

Abortion — Is It OK with God?

Into Our Hands

Since the Supreme Court declared abortion to be a constitutional right of women on January 22, 1973, the Alan Guttmacher Institute (special research affiliate of Planned Parenthood Federation of America) reports that there have been over forty million legal abortions in the U.S. alone. In our country, there are nearly one third as many abortions every year as there are births. Pro-abortionists defend the practice as: (1) a woman's right to choose (a form of birth control); (2) expected in cases of conception from incest or rape; (3) expected in cases where the mother "might" be at risk; (4) preferred in cases where the child "might" have some physical disability or disorder. For those of us who acknowledge God's authority, there are two questions which are relevant to the issue: First, is it wrong to take an innocent person's life at any age?; And second, is an innocent person's life taken when an abortion is performed?

The first question is easily answered by understanding one aspect of God's nature. In Proverbs 6:16-19, we learn of seven things which are an "abomination" to God. Among these seven is "hands that shed innocent blood" (verse 17b). This being true, and IF an abortion includes the willful shedding of innocent blood, THEN abortion is an abomination to God. So the only question which really remains is: "When does a person become a person?" At fertilization of the mother's egg? At implantation of the fertilized egg into the mother's uterus? At a certain stage (day or week) of development after implantation? Or at the time the child is born? The term "viability" is often heard, which is suggestive of that moment when the child could live without any medical intervention outside of the mother's womb. However, not all in the medical field agree that this is the beginning of life and with good reason. Dr. Jerome Lejeune, late professor and world renown geneticist, University of Descartes, Paris, is quoted on the Westside Pregnancy Resource Center of W. Las Angeles, CA, website, "Life is present from the moment of conception."

On the same website, we find the page "Fetal Development" on which the center has posted the following moving account by Dr. Paul E. Rockwell, M.D. "Years ago, while giving an anesthetic for a ruptured tubal pregnancy (at two months), I was handed what I believed to be the smallest human being ever seen. The embryo sac was intact and transparent. Within the sac was a tiny human male, swimming extremely vigorously in the amniotic fluid, while attached to the wall by the umbilical cord. The tiny human was perfectly developed, with long, tapered fingers, feet and toes. It was almost transparent as regards to the skin, and the delicate arteries and veins were prominent to the ends of the fingers. The baby was extremely alive and did not look at all like the photos and drawings of 'embryos' which I have seen. When the sac was opened, the tiny human immediately lost its life and took on what is accepted as the appearance of an embryo at this stage, blunt extremities, etc." Viable or not, what he saw as a living person, is the epitome of "innocence" or the "innocent blood" of Proverbs 6:16.

In addition to this, God has given his perspective which morally and spiritually is really the only one that will count on judgment day. In Psalm 139:13-16, the inspired psalmist David beautifully described the recording of his life by God before it was developed. Not only was he not yet viable, but he was not even "recognizable" as a person (from our perspective), and yet he was known by God. (Read also Judges 13:3-5; Isaiah 44:1-2, 24-28; Isaiah 49:1, 5; Jeremiah 1:5; 20:17-18; Luke 1:13-15, 30-31, 39-44.)

Morally then, every abortion destroys an innocent and living person and is, therefore, an abomination to God.

Randy Watson, Riga, Latvia

"Swiftly we're turning life's daily pages, swiftly the hours are changing to years; how are we using God's golden moments? Shall we reap glory? Shall we reap tears?" So go the words of the familiar song composed by Ruth Caruth. While the song emphasizes the need of taking the saving gospel to a lost and dying world, I am sure we can all see an application easily made to the precious children entrusted to our care. I recently read that from birth to age 18, children have about 118,260 waking hours. Of these, about 15,000 are spent in school. If faithfully taken to and attending Bible class, they would be in the care of Bible class teachers for about 1,872 hours. The result is that while others have about 15% of our children's time to mold and fashion their life and character, *as parents we have direct control of the remaining 85% or 101,388 hours!* The question then comes, how are we to use these hours to the greatest benefit of these precious children entrusted to our care?

While no one can guarantee that a child will not make a wrong decision, if we follow God's plan for raising our children, we will be giving them the absolute best opportunity and training for life that can be given. One passage to which we can look for God's plan is Ephesians 6:1-4:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

While this passage teaches many things, let us emphasize just two aspects of the training that God expects us to use in raising children:

First, give them instruction which is "in the Lord." As godly and concerned parents, our instruction must be that which is in accordance with the mind and will of the Lord. Our training "text" will not be the pop fads of some psychologist but the tried and true Word of God. He has made it clear that His instruction is completely sufficient for all of our needs (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3). Paul goes on to say we should "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," again giving emphasis to the sufficiency of the Lord's will in training children. Wouldn't it be great if parents, when confronted with questions or challenges from their children, would sit with them and seek to give and explain their answer from God's all sufficient Word? If we would use the Word of God in such a manner, we could avoid provoking our children. Instead, we should learn to reason (and teach them to reason) from the inspired Word.

Secondly, have high expectations of our children. Instead of giving place to ungodly ideas such as "I just can't do anything with my children" or "that is just a stage their going through," we should teach and expect our children to "obey" the instruction given and to give "honor" to us as parents. *How sad that many children today live down to their parents expectations of disobedience and rebellion rather than striving to live up to the high expectations of godly parents.* As parents we should have faith in God's plan and expect and encourage our children to follow that divine plan.

It is easy to blame the failure of our children on "peer pressure" and negligent teachers. While we all realize the sad and tragic influence others can have on our children, let's never forget that God has placed them into *our hands* to nourish and admonish. As the song asks, so should we: "How are we using God's golden moments? Shall we reap glory? Shall we reap tears?" The choice is ours.

Jack H. Williams, Independence, MO

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Does God Hear All Prayers?

God communicates the thoughts and desires of His mind (that is, His will) to you and me through His word, the Bible. The way we, as humans, communicate or speak the message of our mind to God is through what the Bible calls prayer. In both the Old Testament, as well as the New, we often read about prayer.

The truth is, it is only through the teaching of the Bible that we can know the Lord's will concerning prayer. Thus, for any question about prayer, we must turn to the word of God and see what it says. Doesn't that make sense to you?

Does the God of heaven hear the prayers of humans? If you mean, "Does God know when people are praying to Him," then the answer is "yes." God knows all that is taking place on the earth at all times. He knows our every thought, every action, and every word spoken, including our prayers. How can we be sure about this? Because the Bible says, "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" (1 John 3:20). All the affairs of mankind are "naked and opened unto the eyes" of the Lord (Hebrews 4:13). So, yes, God knows when humans are praying.

Does the God of heaven hear prayers that are offered to Him in different languages at the same time? Because He is "the Almighty God" (Genesis 17:1), there is nothing that is too hard for Him (Genesis 18:14). He understands all languages in which humans speak. And, yes, He can handle all the prayers that might be coming His way all at the same time!

Should we conclude, though, that every prayer is acceptable to the Lord? To say that He can hear and understand when people speak to Him is one thing. To say that every prayer is acceptable to Him, well, that is another matter entirely. In Proverbs 28:9 it is written, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." This verse makes it clear that if a person refuses to heed or obey the message of God's law, then he should not expect the Lord to receive his prayer. Why? Because God counts it as an abomination when men refuse to obey Him, and all the praying

in the world cannot change that. Prayer cannot take the place of obedience, and the Lord rejects the prayer or cry of a disobedient person.

What does the New Testament say? In 1 Peter 3:12 we read, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers . . ." According to this verse, which prayers does the Lord receive? The prayers of "the righteous." A righteous person is one that does righteousness (1 John 3:7). Since all of God's commands are righteousness (Psalm 119:172), then a righteous person is one that keeps the commandments of the Lord. The Lord promises to receive the prayers of such a person, but not the prayers of the unrighteousness.

One final consideration: What about praying for salvation? Never in the Bible do we read that the Lord or any of His inspired spokesmen told a person that had never been saved something like this: "To be saved from your past sins, you need to pray to God, and He will forgive you." Such a notion is just not in the Bible! It is true that there are New Testament passages in which we read that people were told to pray in order to receive forgiveness, but when we closely examine the contexts of those verses, what do we find? They were addressed or spoken to those that were already Christians and had committed sin after being saved. Thus, as Christians or children of God, in order to get back into the right relationship with God, what they needed to do was pray. Simon, who had already believed and been baptized, was told to pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:13,21-23). We also read, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Again, however, this was not spoken to non-Christians, but to those that were already God's children (compare 1 John 2:12). To become a Christian, a person must believe Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of his or her sins (Luke 13:3), confess faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Does God want men to pray? The Bible says He does. But does He accept all prayers? Not according to the Bible. Let us all search the scriptures and accept the instruction that we find there.

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