

SCRIPTURE ABUSE

40 OF THE MOST ABUSED BIBLE PASSAGES ANALYZED

By Dave DeWitt

There are many ways to go about this study. One could consider the passages most abused by cults, faith healers, the prosperity gospel, the New Apostolic Reformation, the Emergent Church, or just the most difficult passages to interpret. What I have done is to try and deal with those most abused by most abusers most of the time. They are not necessarily those abused by divergent groups. This list comes from my experience, and since yours would be different, I'm sure you would delete some and add others. For example, Brannon House of Worldview Weekend has a book called "Twisted Scripture, Twisted Theology." It's an excellent study (I recommend it), but he deals more with false teachers, so only about half of his are the same as mine. I think most of the Bible passages I have chosen to briefly analyze are the ones most of us will run into most of the time. The passages are arranged not by prominence or significance of abuse but simply as they occur in the Bible.

#1. Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Abuse: There are two common abuses of this passage. First is to say that we are like God spiritually and morally. We are important to God. He even has a moral obligation to us because we are like Him. Second is to say that we are responsible for taking care of the earth ecologically. The earth is our responsibility.

Analysis: First, this passage only says we look like God, not that we are like Him spiritually or morally or because of that He has some moral obligation to us. To *make man in Our image* is defined as *according to Our likeness*. We look like God—one face, two arms, two legs, etc., not like the animals or the angels or the four living creatures. Some liberals and pantheists say Christians have made God in their own image. No, God made us in His image. **Second,** it's true that we humans are to rule over the living creatures of the earth. We are to care for them as we would, say, our automobile. We are to use them and not abuse them. But this does not say we are to preserve them. Most species of animals have already died out, and man has had nothing to do with it. As the world comes to an end, God will destroy everything, including the animals. Animals are *flesh and not spirit* (Isaiah 31:3).

#2. Genesis 6:1-2

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.

Abuse: There is a common, and very old, teaching in the Christian world that this is a description of fallen angels having sexual relations with women on earth. This is based on the fact that the book of Job calls angels *the sons of God*.

Analysis: There are several problems with that teaching. For one thing, it conflicts with Matthew 22:30, which says angelic beings do not marry. More significantly, it violates the context as the basis for interpretation. It's illegitimate to insert a phrase from Job into this passage in Genesis when there is nothing about angels, good or bad, in the context. Some have suggested these are rulers taking whatever women they liked. Possibly. But the context in chapter 5 is about the Seth line (probably *the sons of God*) and the Cain line (probably *the daughters of men*). The first two verses of Genesis 6 fit between the human genealogies of chapter 5 and the judgment on humans in chapter 6. The context is all about people. Angels are never mentioned.

#3. Exodus 20:8-11

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Abuse: Seventh-Day Adventists and Messianic Jews teach that we should keep the Ten Commandments, and there is no reason to eliminate the seventh (Sabbath day) commandment. Since the Sabbath is Saturday, we should gather for worship and not do any work on Saturday. Jesus went to the synagogues on the Sabbath, the apostles worshipped on the Sabbath, even the meeting on the first day of the week in Acts 20 was during the Sabbath (Saturday evening) on the Jewish calendar.

Analysis: It is true that the Sabbath is part of the Ten Commandments and that the Sabbath is Saturday, the last day of the week. It's also true that Jesus and the apostles, especially Paul, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. But Christ and the apostles went to the synagogues on Saturday to do what we call evangelism, not as a place or time of worship. Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4, *neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*. The Sabbath commandment is indeed part of the Ten Commandments, but they are part of the Mosaic Law, which was done away with on the cross of Christ (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3–4). The Apostle Paul spent his whole ministry trying to separate the church from Israel and the Mosaic Law. We should apply the Law, including having a day of rest, because of creation (Genesis 2:2; Exodus 16:23). However, we are not under law but grace, where keeping certain days is a personal choice (Romans 14:5-6). We often hear that the church is to keep the other nine commandments, but that's not exactly the case. Paul called materialism idolatry, Jesus extended adultery and murder to lust and anger. Actually, He seemed to increase the emphasis on the other commandments but concerning the Sabbath, He said, *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath* (Mark 2:27).

#4. Leviticus 27:30

Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD.

Abuse: This verse is used to preach that believers should give 10% of their income to the church before giving anything to other organizations.

Analysis: Tithing in Israel was a 10% tax. There were two of them. One was paid to the Levites to use in their official functions as the leaders of the nation. The second was to be consumed in worship (Deuteronomy 14:22-24). So the tithe was at least 20% per year (with a possible third tithe every

third year—Deuteronomy 14:28). But it was a tax, not a voluntary gift. Gifts were to God, not government, and they are always voluntary, and without a specified percent of income (Exodus 25:2; 1 Chronicles 29:9). In the New Testament, there is no suggestion of tithing, only of paying our taxes (Romans 13 6-7). That’s because Israel was a specific nation living in a specific land, and the church lives in many nations all over the world. Not only is there no New Testament example or command for tithing, there is no example or command of any believer giving a gift to his own local church. For example, the gift of 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 was not a tithe, and it was for the saints in Jerusalem.

5. Psalm 46:10

Cease striving and know that I am God.

Abuse: This is often used to support the idea of what is today called “contemplative prayer,” “breathing prayer,” “centering prayer,” or “soaking prayer.” This is promoted by such teachers as Max Lucado, Beth Moore, and Richard Foster. It’s based in the idea, “If you can conceive it, you can achieve it.” For example, Richard Foster (in his 1978 book *The Celebration of Discipline*, p. 36) wrote:

“Imagination opens the door to faith. If we can ‘see’ in our mind’s eye a shattered marriage whole or a sick person well, it is only a short step to believing it will be so.”

Analysis: But this is the same basic idea as transcendental meditation and kundalini yoga. It assumes that the Bible is not sufficient as a source of revelation from God. And interestingly, when people buy the idea that they need personal revelation from God, they usually tend to follow spiritual leaders that tell them about such things. Godless societies have always had such persons, such as “shamans” and “gurus,” and likewise Christians who believe this will tend to have spiritual leaders who do the same—tell them what God has told them.

Verses 10 and 11 read:

Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah.

Psalm 46:10 has nothing to do with prayer at all. It’s about the sovereignty of God over Israel, and for that matter, over all the nations. The point is, we are to *cease striving* to try to do what only a sovereign God can do. We are to strive for a godly life and leave the nations up to God.

6. Psalm 105:15

Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.

Abuse: This is often used to silence criticism of popular false teachers like Rob Bell, Joel Osteen, and Rick Warren. It is also used in local churches to squelch criticism of a pastor who is teaching false things from the pulpit or making false claims about himself or the church.

Analysis: But we are told to expose and oppose false teaching:

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting (Romans 16:17-18).

Every New Testament book, except Philemon, has warnings and condemnations of false prophets and false teachers. Psalm 105 is about God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (verses 8-14). It’s about the anointed kings and prophets that revealed the Old Testament. Remember, David

would not raise his hand against Saul, even though he was disobedient, because he was God's anointed (1 Samuel 24:3-7). This is about the anointed ones and prophets of Israel that were fulfilling God's covenant to Abraham, not self-proclaimed speakers, or those who are hired as pastors.

7. Song of Solomon, especially verses like 2:4

He has brought me to his banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.

Abuse: The primary abuse of the Song of Solomon is to abandon a literal (author's intended) meaning and interpret it as an allegory of either God's love for Israel (as in the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Aramich Targum) or as Christ's love for the church (from Hyppolytus, Origen, Jerome, Athanasius, Augustine, and Bernard of Clairvaux). This is, in turn, an abuse of Luke 24:27. When Jesus spoke to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke tells us, *Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.* The abuse is that there are many types of Christ in the Old Testament which we should look for and apply.

Analysis: The fact that there are types of Christ in the Old Testament does not give us the authority to decide which things are types. The only way we know something is a type of Christ is when a New Testament author tells us it is (as with Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23). Also, an author may use metaphors and allegories, which should be interpreted as such. But an allegorical method of interpretation is different. It is subjective, not tied to the author's intended meaning, and impossible to verify in any rational manner. There is no textual reason to take the *Song of Solomon* as anything other than a straightforward, literal, poetic expression of romantic love. There is no evidence anywhere that this love poem is a type of Christ or has anything whatsoever to do with God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the church. It is actually degrading to use romantic love, which is based on getting something or at best swapping, as an example of God's love, which is a giving, loyal love without a possibility of reciprocity.

8. 1 Kings 19:12

And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice (KJV).

Abuse: This verse, in the King James Version, is used to support the idea that we can receive inaudible feelings or inclinations from God. These are then used to decide His will for our lives, as in who to marry, what job to take, business investments, building a new church, the "leading" to be a pastor or missionary, etc. It is often expressed as "God led me to...." or "God told me to...."

Analysis: This is about God speaking to His prophet Elijah. God spoke to His prophets. That's what prophets were—those few people in the history of this planet to whom God spoke. Are you a prophet? The revelations of the prophets that we are to apply are written for us in the Bible. That's what the Bible is—a written record of those few, but crucial, revelations from God. And this still small voice was in Hebrew a *qol* (קול), a literal *voice*, often translated as an *outcry* or *proclamation*. This was never an inaudible feeling or inclination. It was God speaking to His prophet to tell him what to do, in a clear audible voice.

9. 2 Chronicles 7:14

... and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Abuse: Basically, everybody from a “Christian” perspective who wants to make a case for saving their country or fixing the earth quotes this verse. For example, dominion theologian Earl Paulk writes:

Some of the strongest fundamental churches still preach that Christ will return to gather national Israel unto Himself, and I say that is deception and will keep the Kingdom of God from coming to pass! Likewise, those who are waiting for Christ to catch a few people away so God can judge the world are waiting in vain! Jesus Christ has now done all He can do, and He waits at the right hand of His Father, until you and I as sons of God, become manifest and make this world His footstool. He is waiting for us to say, “Jesus, we have made the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of our God, and we are ruling and reigning in Your world. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

Analysis: Any even casual reading of this passage can identify *my people* as Israel and *their land* as the land of Israel that God promised to Abraham. Verse 10 tells us that this is about *the goodness that the LORD had shown to David and to Solomon and to His people Israel*. There is no intent whatsoever here to say that God would heal any land of any other people. God’s people today are the church, and their only land is the place Christ is preparing for them in the heavenlies (John 14:1-3). The church exists all over the world. It is not connected to any particular nation, or people, or land on earth. There is no biblical command whatsoever for the church to be involved in rehabilitating the earth or its nations. Neither Christ nor the apostles ever suggested such a thing, nor were they involved in it. This passage is God’s response to Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the Temple. God told Solomon, *I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice*. This is all about, and only about, Israel, its people, its land, and its Temple.

10. Matthew 6:10

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Abuse: This is often used as a command for us to bring God’s kingdom to earth by rebuilding, restoring, and saving the earth as a kingdom of God.

Analysis: This is part of “The Lord’s Prayer.” It is a request from God’s people for Him, not them, to bring about God’s kingdom on earth. This is a prayer for God to usher in His prophetic promises to build a Millennial Kingdom on earth (Isaiah 61; Jeremiah 31; Matthew 24; Revelation 20), which will follow a seven-year tribulation (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24; Revelation 20), where God will destroy much of the earth as a judgment on its sin. There is absolutely nothing here, or anywhere else in Scripture, that suggests that we should be bringing about God’s kingdom or His will on earth.

11. Matthew 7:1

Do not judge so that you will not be judged.

Abuse: The idea given by the tolerant element of Christianity is that believers should not condemn, criticize, or take action against others because this is a form of judgment.

Analysis: The judgment Scripture prohibits is hypocritical judgment (Matthew 7:5) and judgment which results in physical or spiritual condemnation (Luke 6:37). Condemnation, the payback of an *eye for an eye* type of judgment, is up to God and assigned on earth only to government (Romans 13:1-4). It is never to be carried out by an individual. But Christ and the apostles continually in-

structed the church to be intolerant and judgmental of sinful actions carried out by so-called believers. Concerning evaluative intolerance, Christ and the apostles said:

- Luke 12:57—*And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?*
- John 7:24—*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*
- 1 Corinthians 5:12—*For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?*
- 1 Corinthians 11:13—*Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*
- 1 Corinthians 11:29—*For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.*
- 2 Corinthians 11:19—*For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly.*
- 2 Corinthians 11:20—*For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you.*
- Galatians 1:9—*As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!*
- Revelation 2:2—*I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.*
- Revelation 2:20—*But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

12. Matthew 18:18

Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

Abuse: There are two common abuses of this passage. The Roman Catholic church abuses this by saying the Catholic church has the authority to bind and loose decrees on earth. The Protestant abuse is usually in the form of pastors or speakers “binding Satan” in their prayers and proclamations.

Analysis: This verse is in the context of church discipline. Jesus told His disciples that if their brother sins, they should go to him first in private, then with two or three others, then if he is shown to be indeed sinning and refuses to repent, the matter is to be taken to the church, defined as a plurality of believers. When a group of mature believers look at the situation and the Scripture, they will determine heaven’s answer because *where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst* (verse 20, discussed below). This method of discussion-to-determine-truth was used in the early church to ascertain the truth where there were differences (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

13. Matthew 18:20

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

Abuse: This is often applied to a service in an institutional local church. The idea is that you cannot sufficiently or accurately worship God on your own. You need to be in a church.

Analysis: As mentioned above, this is about the discipline of a sinning believer. And for that, we must ultimately take it to the church. Removal of fellowship is not something one or two believers should do. This needs to be taken to a plurality gathering of believers who look at the situation over a period of time (Matthew 18:15-19; 1 Corinthians 5). The only gathering Jesus specified was to take the Lord’s Supper Communion (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). Of course, the fellowship and sharing of

believers together is valuable, and the apostles did that from house-to-house (Acts 2:42). But the Scripture is full of passages of how we should meditate, worship, and pray to God on our own, in our closet, or privately. The idea that we need to be gathered together to be in God's presence denies the omnipresence and omniscience of God.

14. Matthew 22:39

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Abuse: This statement is used to promote the idea that we need to love ourselves, and that one of our basic problems is that we cannot love God and others because we do not love ourselves.

Analysis: Actually, Paul said *no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it* (Ephesians 5:29). The reason we have non-chemically caused anxiety, depression, and suicide is because people love themselves too much. The opposite of love is apathy. If we were apathetic toward ourselves, we would not be concerned enough to be anxious, depressed, or suicidal. The given, obvious, universal nature of everyone is to love themselves. The command, and challenge, of this statement is to love your neighbor that way.

15. Matthew 25:35-36

For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.

Abuse: This passage is often used to promote the idea of Christians being involved in social justice or providing social services for the unbelieving world. This is done either as a means of evangelism, or purely for social improvement. For example, the Catholic church claims that it feeds, clothes, shelters, and educates more people than any other organization in the world. Most (as in almost all) of current Protestant missions and short-term missions are about providing social services. Most of the Christian organizations, which have coupled social services with evangelism and discipleship, are now only involved in social services (such as the Salvation Army, the YMCA, and most inner city missions).

Analysis: First of all, we need to recognize that it is Christian to be compassionate to the needy, whoever they may be. There are Christian hospitals, children's homes, addiction clinics, orphanages, food distribution centers, and emergency aid organizations all over the world. When have you ever seen a Muslim counterpart to any of these things, reaching out to a hurting world beyond Islamic countries? How many Hindu and Buddhist examples of those things do you know about? Jesus showed compassion and never discouraged giving to the poor. But this is not the thrust of the New Testament. The example of Christ and the apostles is to give the message of salvation to the world and provide for the church, not provide for the world and hope they become Christians. This passage is actually the world providing humanitarian aid to Christians not Christians to the world. This is a scene after the Second Coming of Christ, where Jesus rewards people who are not identified as believers. They are actually surprised that their humanitarian acts had anything to do with the work of Christ. Jesus commends them because they have given assistance to the believers of the tribulation period who were persecuted by the antichrist and his government. These are then ushered into the Millennial Kingdom because, as Jesus said, *you did it to one of these brothers of mine*. The point of the account is that God considers it valuable to help those who belong to Him. Mark 9:41 records Jesus as saying, *For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of*

Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward. There is nothing here to support the idea of giving social aid to the world.

16. Mark 9:40

For he who is not against us is for us.

Abuse: This passage is often used to say we should not oppose unbelievers who are conservatives and do not oppose Christianity. The classic examples today include conservative Mormons, like Mitt Romney and Glenn Beck. For example, many conservative Christians (and I wonder if they are not conservative first and Christian second) say something like, “God is using Glenn Beck.” The idea is that we should not criticize those who are in our conservative camp.

Analysis: Let me quote Brannon Howse’s excellent response to this idea:

Really? God is using Glenn Beck, a New Age Mormon? A guy who has made statements like, “We need a Jesus and a Buddha.” I don’t think so. Don’t believe for one minute that God is using Glenn Beck for the advancement of righteousness when he has gathered together leaders from all religions—including Muslim imams—in a spiritual enterprise to look to the “one God” Beck has proclaimed. God would not use Glenn Beck or anyone else to gather Christians together with another Jesus, another Gospel, or false religions. To do so would be a clear violation of Romans 16:17, *Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.*

Mark 9:40 is about believers who were casting out demons but were not part of the 12. “Wesley’s Explanatory Notes” on Mark 9 reads:

“Probably this was one of John the Baptist’s disciples, who believed in Jesus, though he did not yet associate with our Lord’s disciples.”

Jesus said that other true believers who are not part of our group or organization should not be hindered because they are not against us, and *he who is not against us is for us*. But when speaking about the Pharisees, a Rabbinic conservative Jewish organization, Jesus said, “*He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters*” (Matthew 12:30). Conservatism is not Christianity, and conservative leaders are not necessarily Christian leaders. Cult leaders, like Romney and Beck, should not be followed, no matter how conservative they are. This just illustrates the problem of putting our conservative national patriotism ahead of, or equating it with, the Kingdom of God.

17. John 6:54

He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Abuse: This statement of Jesus is used to support the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation—the belief that the elements of Communion (the bread and the wine), when blessed by the Catholic church, become the physical body and physical blood of Christ, as they are eaten by the believer. This ingestion of the elements, when offered by the clergy of the Church of Rome, aids in the believer attaining *eternal life*.

Analysis: Nothing aids in anyone attaining eternal life except faith in the death of Christ on the cross as a both a necessary and sufficient payment for his or her sin. And that is what Jesus is talking about here. These are metaphors (*eats and drinks* is faith, *My flesh* and *My blood* are His death on the cross). This is very typical of Jesus’ teaching (as in *vine, branches, shepherd, sheep*) where, in

this case, He made it hard to understand so that those who did not believe would identify themselves by leaving Him. I have often made this challenge:

To any member of the clergy of the Roman Catholic church: If you will take the elements of Communion as specified by the Catholic Church and have your stomach pumped, and if those elements have changed to blood and flesh, I will become a Catholic.

18. John 10:34

Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS'?"

Abuse: The New Apostolic Reformation, the Word of Faith movement, and the Mormons claim that this verse shows that people are little gods, and, in the case of Mormonism, that all people can become a god, and God was once a man on the planet Kolob.

Analysis: Jesus is quoting Psalm 82:6 to point out that the word *god* [אֱלֹהִים (*Elhoim*)], like all words, should not be taken out of context. It is like the words often translated Lord [אֲדֹנָי (*adoni*) in Hebrew, κύριος (*kurios*) in Greek] that are often used of both God and humans, depending on the context. Jesus is saying it is not that I use the word "God" that should get your attention, it is the context of My life that should determine if I am the Son of God. So He goes on to say, *If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father* (verses 37-38). The point is, it's not the word *God* that they should be focusing on, but Jesus' whole life and ministry and message. Was He doing the works of God or not?

19. John 12:32

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.

Abuse: This statement is often used to support the increasingly popular concept of Christian universalism. The idea is that, in the end, all people everywhere will come to Christ, and no one will go to hell.

Analysis: The statement is explained in the next verse. The Apostle John tells us that *He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die*. So the context tells us that the meaning of being *lifted up* is being lifted up on the cross. Furthermore, the statement was made just before His crucifixion. The statement that He will *draw all men* to Himself is universal atonement, not universal salvation. The cross draws all people to Christ in that He died for the sins of the whole world (Romans 5:18; 1 John 2:2). But that does not mean the whole world will be saved. Only those who receive Him by faith are saved (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5), and the rest are destined for an eternal damnation (Matthew 8:12; Revelation 20:15).

20. John 20:23

If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.

Abuse: The apostles, today represented by The Roman Catholic church or modern day apostles, have the authority to forgive sin or not forgive it. The "Catholic Encyclopedia" says that "absolution is the remission of sin or of the punishment due to sin granted by the Church" (November 23, 2013, www.newadvent.org).

Analysis: Clearly, no one but God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7). In the above passage, Jesus just gave the apostles the Holy Spirit, and with His power they would start the church, the body of Christ. The meaning of the statement (or any statement) that Jesus gave the apostles can be most easily interpreted by what actually happened in the lives of the apostles and how they applied it. At no time did they see themselves as capable of or commanded to forgive or retain sin. What they did see themselves commanded to do was to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. They also understood that in order for someone to receive it, someone had to go and tell them (Roman 10:15). There is a sense they would forgive or retain sin in that their travels and proclamations would determine who received the message. They could not govern a person's response, but they could carry the message of forgiveness of sin, without which people would retain their sin.

21. Acts 2:16-17

... but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel; "and it shall be in the last days," God says, "That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Abuse: Some charismatic-oriented groups claim that we are in the *last days*, and therefore, we are seeing these things today. They claim the prophecy (of Joel 2 quoted by Peter in Acts 2) is being fulfilled in the modern day prophets [such as the New Apostolic Reformation], with speaking in tongues, with modern visions of people going to heaven, and Muslims seeing dreams of Jesus.

Analysis: Joel 2:28-32 describes these events as taking place *after these things* and *these things* refers to Israel's future repentance and restoration (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1) after the Second Coming of Christ. During the Millennial Kingdom, God will *pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind*, resulting in these miraculous events. So the prophecy, visions, and dreams that Joel predicts are after the Second Coming of Christ, not before it. They proclaim Christ has already come, not that we should be looking for Him to come in the near future. And that is exactly how Peter is using it in Acts 2, to show that the tongues speaking the people were hearing from the apostles were an indication that Jesus the Messiah had already come. Before the Second Coming of Christ, both the Old and New Testaments predict a time of tribulation on earth where believers are persecuted and killed, not a time when they experience prophecy, visions, and dreams.

22. Acts 2:44-45

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

Abuse: Some claim this is socialism. Since they had all things in common, sold their property and possessions and distributed them to everyone in need, the church should participate in a socialist (and ultimately communist) view of the economy.

Analysis: First, let's define a socialist view of the economy. Socialism is where the government (by various means and categories) taxes those with more wealth and distributes it to where it (the government) determines there to be need. So the government determines what it means to be wealthy, takes money from them, determines what a need is, and distributes the money of those it considers wealthy to what it considers a need. This takes all morality out of giving. For example, if you are hungry and I give you a sandwich, I am expressing generosity, and you are appreciative. If, on the other hand, some agency steals my sandwich and gives it to you, I am resentful, and you will look

for them to give you another one. Instead of generosity and appreciation, we now have resentment and laziness. Socialism destroys the motivation for work and achievement on the part of the giver and receiver.

What is described in Acts 2 is believers getting together to voluntarily meet a need. There were many Jews in Jerusalem from all around the Mediterranean because of the festivals of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost. Thousands of them became believers in the early days of the church. Before they returned to their hometowns, they wanted to stay a while and hear the apostles' teaching. So the believers in Jerusalem *began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need* so these new believers could stay to learn from the apostles. It was apparently a good investment, since it resulted in churches being established all over the Roman Empire. There was no socialism here, just believers giving to other believers in need.

23. Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them.

Abuse: Most pastors teach that this means the church should meet on Sunday, the first day of the week.

Analysis: Jesus and the apostles usually went to a synagogue on the Sabbath, which is, of course, Saturday. Jesus never gathered in a special way with His followers on Sunday. His only specified gathering was for the Lord's Supper Communion. That gathering was on a Thursday, and He said it was to be done *as often as you do it* (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). After Peter's sermon, on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, we read of the church,

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.

So apparently, they were meeting daily. In Philippi, Paul and his companions met on Saturday. In Acts 16:13, we read,

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

After Lydia, the jailor's family, and apparently a few others became believers, they met at Lydia's house before Paul left the city. It would only make sense that they met on Saturday, since no change of day is mentioned. Even in this Acts 20 passage, it is not completely clear that their meeting was on Sunday. They gathered in the evening, met all night and had the Lord's Supper together in the early morning hours. On the Jewish calendar their evening meeting would be Saturday, with Communion Sunday morning. On the Roman calendar, they began meeting on Sunday and had Communion on Monday. And all this is an example, not a command. If examples were commands, we should all be celibate. The point is, there is no Scripture that specifies a day for the church to gather. Actually, Paul said,

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind (Romans 14:5). And to the Galatians, he said, *You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain* (Galatians 4:10-11).

24. Romans 1:26-27

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Abuse: Some pro-homosexual “Christians” claim that this is bad homosexuality, just as there is bad heterosexuality, so homosexuality itself is not condemned here. Others claim this is a condemnation of heterosexuals who were abandoning what was natural for them to desire other men. So this is about heterosexuals, not homosexuals.

Analysis: From cover-to-cover, from Moses to Jesus to the apostles, the Bible condemns the act of homosexuality (Genesis 19:4-7; Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Matthew 19:4-5; Romans 1:26-27, 32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10). The Bible does not recognize, nor has science demonstrated, that anyone is born homosexual. There are only homosexual acts, and they are always an abomination to God.

25. Romans 6:6-7

... knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.

Abuse: The “New Man View,” sometimes called “The Reformed View,” of the spiritual life uses this passage to claim that believers no longer have an old man or sin nature. We only sin in the flesh, not in our spiritual nature. We are only a new man, not a combination of old and new.

Analysis: Romans 6 deals with our position before God. We are positionally free from sin. *Our old man was crucified with Him* giving us a position of holiness before God. But that does not mean we do not have a sin nature. In the same way, Christ defeated Satan on the cross, but that does not mean he ceased to exist. In verse 11, Paul wrote, *consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*. Why would I have to consider myself dead to sin if I had no sin nature? In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul wrote, *lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self*. Why such a command if I have no old self to lay aside? If my sin is only in my flesh, then it isn’t spiritual, therefore, it isn’t sin. Flesh, as in plants and animals, cannot sin. Only a spiritual nature can sin. So either my flesh is spiritual or my spiritual nature has an old man, a sin nature I need to continually put off.

26. Romans 8:14

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Abuse: There is a common teaching that says we who are believers are led mystically by feelings and inclinations coming from the Spirit of God in order to make decisions about things not specified in the Bible.

Analysis: The idea of mystical leading is common to every religion and is the basis of every form of idolatry all over the world and all through time. But there is none of that in the Bible. Once again, in this passage, the context determines the meaning. The previous verse (13) reads, *for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live*. Contextually, all who are being led by the Spirit of God are *putting to death the*

deeds of the body. If you are putting to death the sinful deeds of the body, then you are being led by the Spirit, if you are not, you're not.

27. 1 Corinthians 7:15

Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

Abuse: Some teach that this allows for divorce, and since the divorced person *is not under bondage in such cases*, they are free to re-marry.

Analysis: From cover-to-cover, from Moses to the prophets to Christ to the apostles, the Bible condemns divorce and remarriage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Divorce is, of course, sometimes unavoidable. No one can force someone to stay married to them. And it is no more sinful to having been divorced than having been murdered. The statement in this verse assumes that only an unbeliever would leave, in the sense of pursuing a divorce. Paul says that, in such cases, the one who had been abandoned *is not under bondage*. So that person should not be obligated to provide things like sexual favors, financial support, or fellowship to the one who pursued the divorce. But there is no permission here, or anywhere in Scripture, for a divorced person to get remarried.

28. I Corinthians 7:27-28

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

Abuse: Those seeking to justify remarriage after divorce use this to say Paul is suggesting that one who is released from a wife via divorce should not seek a wife, but if he or she gets remarried, he or she has not sinned.

Analysis: Repeating the point above, the Bible consistently condemns divorce and remarriage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). The question we should ask is not what can we get away with or get by with but, after reading that list of passages, what do you think is closest to the heart of God? Clearly, if one is released from a wife through her death, he is free to remarry. Widowers and virgins are free to marry, but Paul does not recommend it.

29. 1 Corinthians 15:29

... what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

Abuse: The Mormon, Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints (the LDS) teaches that living people can be baptized for dead people, thus insuring the salvation of people who have already died. The LDS faithful believe they can pay money to the Mormon church to have someone be baptized for a dead relative.

Analysis: There are three Christian views on this passage: (1) It refers to those who became believers and were baptized because of the testimony of former believers who have died. (2) It refers to new converts replacing (being baptized in the place of) those who died. (3) Most likely, Paul is not

commending the practice or commenting on it one way or the other but only saying it would be meaningless *if the dead are not raised at all*.

30. Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Abuse: Some, such as hyper (five-point) Calvinism, teach that our faith is *not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*. Therefore, there is no free will choice in salvation.

Analysis: In English, the nearest word to the phrase *and that not of yourselves* would be the one described. But in Greek, the word order is not significant. Actually, it is likely that it is neither the grace nor the faith but the salvation which Paul says is *that not of yourselves*. For sure, our faith, like everything else, is in the sovereign plan of God. So there is a sense in which our faith is from God. But it is also a free will decision without which we cannot please God (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:12; Hebrews 11:6).

31. Ephesians 4: 11

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.

Abuse: There are two common abuses of this verse. Some use it to say we have current-day apostles and prophets. Others use it to say every local church should have a pastor.

Analysis: First of all, we need to make a general observation that applies to both of these abuses. The book of Ephesians is a cyclical letter which addresses the universal church, the body of Christ—*and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body* (Ephesians 1:22-23). There is not one thing about the local church or any assembly of a church in Ephesians. In the early church, before the end of the writing of the book of Revelation, there were apostles and prophets in the church. But the apostles replaced themselves with leaders called elders, overseers, and deacons. They did not increase nor suggest there would ever be an increase in the apostles. First Corinthians 13:8 says prophets would cease, and Revelation 22:18 says that we should not add prophecy to that book, the last book of the New Testament written. As to pastors, this is the only time *shepherding* is translated as a pastor, and he is a person given to shepherding the whole body of Christ, not being the CEO of some local 501(c) 3. All New Testament leaders: (1) had responsibility without authority, only the apostles had authority; (2) were a plurality in every situation, never a one-man leader; and (3) were responsible for the believers throughout a city, or larger geographic region, never just a local assembly. If a pastor was to be confined to a local church, then so are the other people mentioned here.

32. Philippians 1:26

... so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Abuse: Many pastors, speakers, and authors teach that there is a good and a bad form of pride. For example, the Louw and Nida lexicon says the above word translated *proud confidence* is “the basis for or the content of one’s feeling of legitimate pride.” Therefore, some forms of pride are good.

Analysis: There is absolutely no good form of pride. Pride is the foundation of most, if not all, sin. It is the original sin of Satan and continues to be the mentality that keeps people from God.

Pride is an attitude of value independent from God.

Humility is an attitude of value dependent upon God.

Pride is rebellion against God. Humility is submission to God. Repentance is based in humility. Conflicts, with God and other people, are based in pride. Reconciliation is based in humility. Never, ever, be proud of anything, not you children, your country, your school, your church—not anything.

It is unfortunate that some of the, especially more recent, translations of the Bible render the word *καυχάομαι* (*kauchaomai*) as *pride* or as in the NASB translation above *proud confidence*. The word *καυχάομαι* (*kauchaomai*) is better translated *boasting* or just *confidence*. There are two basic ideas expressed by this word. One is the idea of being confident of the truth of a message or messenger, the other is to make a statement of that confidence. For example, Paul said, *Boasting καυχάομαι* (*kauchaomai*) *is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord* (2 Corinthians 12:1). It was necessary for Paul to proclaim with confidence the revelations he had received from the Lord. But it was not profitable for him, even though it was good for us. But this is not pride. Paul is giving all the glory to God as the source of the revelation. *But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word* (Isaiah 66:2).

33. Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Abuse: This passage is used for every kind of endeavor Christians attempt. We use it for getting a good job, making a good grade on a test, or succeeding in athletics or team sports competition.

Analysis: In the two verses before this, Paul wrote, *...I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.* There is nothing wrong with asking God to help us in our life's endeavors. But the above statement does not promise that we can do anything we want to accomplish in life because Christ strengthens us. That can easily be a form of pride. This verse is not about accomplishments. It's about enduring whatever situation life presents, whether prosperity or hardship, wealth or poverty, being filled or being hungry, having abundance, or suffering. This is not about Jesus helping us achieve our life's goals, it's about enduring life's situations *through Him who strengthens us*.

34. Hebrews 6:4-6

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Abuse: This is a difficult passage and several plausible views have been offered. But a common illegitimate interpretation is that this teaches that saved people can lose their salvation.

Analysis: No one who is actually saved can lose his or her salvation. If a saved person can lose their salvation, then God is not sovereign, since the salvation of the saved was determined by the election of God in eternity past (Ephesians 1; Romans 8–9).

As to the above passage, there are several views that do not involve losing salvation:

- (1) The people who *have fallen away* were never saved. But no unbeliever was ever described as *enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*.
- (2) The people who *have fallen away* were unsaved members of a local church. But one does not get those things from a local church.
- (3) The people who *have fallen away* have lost the assurance of their salvation. It is true that the assurance of salvation can be lost. One who is perpetually and unrepentantly sinning should not be assured of their salvation (1John 2:4). But this passage says *it is impossible to renew them again to repentance*. That would not be true of a perpetual sinner who repents.
- (4) More likely, the author is referring to Hebrew Christians going back into the Jewish animal sacrifice system as a basis *to renew them again to repentance*. This would be impossible, since the animal sacrifice system was over and replaced by Christ's death on the cross. That would mean *they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame*. If that is the case, it would seem to be the same idea as in Hebrews 10:26, *For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice [that is, an animal sacrifice] for sins*.

35. Hebrews 10:25

...not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Abuse: Most pastors teach that this verse says we should go to church on Sunday.

Analysis: Of course, there is nothing here about going to “church” or doing it on Sunday. The church is who we are, not where we go to assemble, there is a command to not forsake *our own assembling together*. Most likely, the problem was not that these believers were not assembling but they were assembling in synagogues with other Jews (as was their tradition), rather than assembling themselves together with other believers. The emphasis often overlooked in this verse is the word ἑαυτῶν (*heauton*) *ourselves*. The point of the statement is not just that believers should assemble together but that they should assemble **themselves** together. *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together* (KJV). So when we gather on Sunday morning in mega churches or “seeker” churches, oriented around getting unbelievers to assemble with us, are not fulfilling this verse. I suggest one of the big problems with most Christians who go to “church” every Sunday is that they never assemble themselves together.

36. Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.

Abuse: Many church leaders and pastors use this verse to teach that those who attend their church should submit to the elders and pastor(s) of the church.

Analysis: It is interesting that these local church pastors and elders never suggest that Christians should submit to the leaders of what they call para-church organizations. There is nothing here about submitting to pastors or elders. The word for *leader* here is ἡγεῖσθαι (*hegeomai*), the general word for any leader. Interestingly, this word is defined for a Christian leader in this same chapter of He-

brews. In verse 7, we read, *Remember those who led [ἡγήομαι (hegeomai)] you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.* So we have a definition of a leader as one *who spoke the word of God to you.* We also have what seems to be a description of submission, *considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.* So we are to imitate the faith and conduct of those who teach and follow the Word of God. Some might be pastors and elders, some might be leaders in other venues.

37. 1 Peter 3:19-20

... in which also He [Christ] went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

Abuse: Some teach that Jesus preached the Gospel in sheol/hades to those who have died, giving them another chance to be saved.

Analysis: Even if this passage says that Jesus *made proclamation* to the people in sheol/hades, it does not mean He preached the Gospel to them. The *proclamation* could be about His accomplishment of the payment for sin, the upcoming judgment of those who were disobedient and the leading of the believers from the good part of sheol/hades to heaven (Ephesians 4:8). But more likely, this passage is saying that Jesus preached, either by a theophany or through Noah, *in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark.* Those who heard His message in those days did not believe and are *the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient* in that time before the flood.

38. John 4:8

The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Abuse: The idea of some who quote this line is that God is love, so love is all that really matters. We hear: “Love wins,” “All we really need is love,” and “My God is a loving God and He would not send anyone to hell.” Of course, love is defined many different ways, but it usually includes some sort of tolerance.

Analysis: True, God is love. But He is not a one-attribute God. God is also holy, just, true, righteous, wrathful, sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and He does not change. Paul wrote, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness* (Romans 1:18). To those who say, “My God is loving and would not send anyone to hell,” we should reply with something like this: “True, your God does not send people to hell. But your God is figment of you own imagination. He is just an idol you made up, and does not actually exist in the real world. The real God that actually really exists is more than just love and does send people to hell.”

39. Revelation 2:1, 8, 18; 3:1, 7, 14

To the angel of the church in Ephesus [and six other cities] write...

Abuse: Most pastors claim these are letters written to the pastors of local churches. The angel of the church is the pastor of the church.

Analysis: This idea is full of problems.

- 1) There is no example of a pastor of a “local church” in the New Testament. This is just another desperate attempt to find their job in the Bible and use every passage they can to force fit it into what they are doing.
- 2) The church referred to here is all the believers in a city, not some assembly of believers within that city.
- 3) The word for “pastor” is ποιμήν (*poimen*) the word for “shepherd.” The word here is ἄγγελος (*angelos*), the word for “angel” or “messenger.” This word is never used of a pastor or shepherd.
- 4) The word ἄγγελος (*angelos*) refers to the heavenly beings called “angels” everywhere else throughout the book of Revelation.
- 5) The first verse of the book tells us that this revelation was something that Jesus *sent and communicated it by His angel* [ἄγγελος (*angelos*)] *to His bond-servant John*. So it seems that Jesus is telling *to the angel* a revelation which John is to pass along with respect to the church at Ephesus, etc.

40. Revelation 22:18

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;

Abuse: Many claim that this prohibition against adding to *the prophesy of this book* only refers to the prophetic message of the book of Revelation. Therefore, it does not condemn adding to the Bible or getting new revelation from God beyond the Bible.

Analysis: Indeed, *the prophecy of this book* refers to the prophecy of the book of Revelation. John clearly has in mind the book he has just written, not the whole Bible. But any additional prophecy would be an addition to the book of Revelation. The word John uses for “prophecy” here is προφητεία (*propheteia*), the general word for “revelation” from God. This is not the word ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*) used in Revelation 1:1 to describe the foretelling content of the book. So John is condemning any revelation from God being added to the book of Revelation, which he has just recorded. Since the book of revelation is the last book of the Bible (written in the mid 90s A.D.), anything claiming to be verbal revelation from God would add to it. It’s as if I set down a row of bottles, and when I sat down the last down, I said, “No one should add to this bottle.” But, of course, anyone who added to that bottle would be adding to the whole row, since that on was the last one in the row (kind of like this point in our study).