

# FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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## I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT!

Barry O'Dell

“Only God can judge me” is a common sentiment in our world. This phrase is typically used when one’s personal behavior is called into question. Matthew 7:1 is often quoted by those who shoot off a personal deflection in response to a rebuke from someone who is offended by their behavior. The biblical phrase “let the one without sin cast the first stone” is also used as a defensive mechanism by those who do not want their behavior called into question.

Sadly, this non-judgmental, accept anything, and condemn nothing mindset has crept into the religious world. This writer has noticed an abuse of one particular passage in the Bible when it comes to dealing with certain issues in the church – Romans 14. “Romans 14 says you can’t judge me if I use instrumental music in worship.” “Romans 14 says you shouldn’t judge a church for using praise teams or dramatic reenactments.” “Romans 14 says that you should not judge a church that uses women for leading in the worship of the church.” The lack of understanding and careless use of Romans 14 has caused many to believe, “I can do whatever I want and you can’t judge me!”

First, it is understood that God is the Judge (Rom. 14:12). No one who has ever read and believed the Bible would deny that fact! We will be judged by the words of Christ (Jn. 12:48-50), not the opinions of men. God as Judge is not the issue at hand.

Second, a question: With what is Romans 14 dealing? Paul addresses two topics specifically. He addresses the eating of meat in eight verses (2-3, 6, 15, 17, 20-21, 23). He also addresses the observance of “a day” in two verses (5-6). Paul was not writing about the worship of the church! He was discussing matters of “doubtful disputations” (KJV, v. 1), or “disputes over doubtful things” (NKJ, v. 1). That Paul was dealing with matters of personal preference based on one’s own understanding is further proven in verse 22: “Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God.” To conflate the matters of certain food and setting aside a certain day for one’s own use to God

with matters involving the worship of the church is a gross misuse of Romans 14.

Third, that Paul is not dealing with matters of worship as mentioned above is further clarified in Romans 15:1-6. He wrote, “That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6). The church at Rome was to be in complete unity! Paul used similar language when writing to other congregations (1 Cor. 1:10-13; Phil. 3:15-16). Would permitting changes in the worship of the church at Rome have promoted unity? Of course not! However, would the behavior of individual Christians who were concerned about other Christian’s consciences have promoted congregational unity? Of course it would! Paul makes the point, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (Rom. 14:7). Our personal behavior can have an effect on other people and we must be aware of that! That is exactly what Paul was discussing in verses 15 and 19: “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died...Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another.”

The misuse of Romans 14 to justify changes to the church and worship reminds us of what Peter wrote about those who misuse Scripture: “they that are unlearned and unstable wrest (twist), as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16). It seems that the current trends of society have impacted the church in a negative way. The attitude of “you can’t judge me” is alive and well within the minds of many. The reality is, we are commanded to judge and it is to be “righteous judgment” (Jn. 7:24). We need to be able to discern between what is good and evil (Heb. 5:14). We are not permitted, nor are we capable of judging the hearts of others. In that sense only God can judge, “for the Lord searcheth all hearts” (1 Chr. 28:9). However, Jesus tells us, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). A false teacher and /or false ways can be known and there are many who misuse Romans 14 to push an agenda for change in the church.

*“The attitude of ‘you can’t judge me’ is alive and well within the minds of many.”*

## WORSHIPING WITH HEART

Farrell Nicholson

When the Lord Jesus went through Samaria, “being wearied with His journey” (Jn. 4:6), He stopped and rested on the structure of a 75-foot deep well and spoke to a woman from that region about the generations-old dispute between the Samaritans and the Jews over, basically, who had been right and where was the proper place to worship God--Jerusalem as the Jews taught, or Samaria as her people taught. The Master settled the matter for His and her contemporary time: “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews” (Jn. 4:22). He immediately followed that declaration with, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (v. 23). The Father--His, hers, yours, and mine--seeks the true worshipers to worship him. And these “true worshipers” are whom? Those who worship the Father in spirit and in truth. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (v. 24). While the author loves the pattern of worship set forth in the New Testament--and strives to practice it and contend earnestly for it (Jude 3)--the worship of God the Father in truth is not the thrust of the article here. Our purpose here is to proclaim that the true worshipers of God must worship Him with heart, in spirit as well as in truth.

From his reading of the Holy Scriptures, this author believes that the spring of true worship is joy. The town of Mammoth Spring, Arkansas’ namesake is a spring equally deep as the one beside which the Messiah revealed Himself to the earnest Samaritan (Jn. 4:6). This large, “mammoth” spring, pumping out 9 million gallons of water hourly, is the head source for the popular Spring River. Just as this spring is the prolific source of water benefitting thousands of people and millions of fish/wildlife, joy is the basis for a heart that is ready to worship God in spirit.

When Jesus began His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the people “spread their clothes in the way. And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen” (Lk. 19:36-37). When the jealous Pharisees told Him to rebuke them, He answered, “if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (v. 40). The people began to “rejoice.” They could not help but express their immense joy at the ascent of the Messiah to the city of David (2 Sam. 6:12). He deserved praise, and

to silence the disciples would cause the stones to cry out to fill the void. Joy was the catalyst for their worship.

Later, Queen Candace of Ethiopia’s officer, after having learned of Jesus, having believed, having confessed Him, and having been baptized into Him (Acts 8:35-38; Gal. 3:27), “went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). His life having been changed forever, having gained an Advocate before God and a propitiation for sins (1 Jn. 2:1-2), joy flooded into his heart as he went home a redeemed individual.

Later still, the apostle Peter would encourage soon-suffering Christians by reminding them of that which animated their worship and service to Christ: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). Christians then and now, absent from the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6), love Him, and rejoice with joy unspeakable in anticipation of seeing Him one day! This anticipation of being present with the King furnishes our spirits with joy in taking of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:16), in singing (Jas. 5:13), in praying (Rom. 12:12), in giving (2 Cor. 9:7), and in hearing the proclamation of God’s Word (Acts 2:41; Acts 13:48): **joy in worship.**

One of the founding editors of this journal, the late Clovis Ragsdale, told the author that after he greeted brethren in the foyer, he would quickly find his seat, ready to do what he came to do--worship.

Brother Ragsdale could preach with spirit. How beautiful were the feet that with vigor carried this man to worship!

Isaac Watts, “The Father of English Hymnody,” was, like his father, a Nonconformist. His “We’re Marching to Zion” is a salvo against the cold formalism of the Established Church. In a verse absent from most songbooks, Watts’ pen screams, “The sorrows of the mind/Be banished from the place; Religion never was designed/Religion never was designed; To make our pleasures less/To make our pleasures less.”

It is in worship according to truth and in a fervent spirit that men, women, and children become that which the Father above is seeking to worship Him. It is by Jesus that we “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks unto His name” (Heb. 13:15). Attitude is equally as important as truth (Jn. 4:23-24); let us love and worship the God of heaven with all of our heart (Matt. 22:37), with joy.

*Farrell preaches for the Agnos church of Christ  
in Agnos, AR*

***“...joy is the basis for a heart that is ready to worship God in spirit.”***

## UNITED IN THE SAME MIND

John Gaines

Is unity of thought possible for New Testament Christians? It must be, because Paul expected the Corinthians to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Unity in the way we think about what the Bible teaches was not an optional matter for the Corinthians and it must not be for us.

While thinking the same way always makes for peace and harmony within the church, there is a difference between revealed matters and matters of expediency. Expediencies concern areas where God has not spoken explicitly in the Scriptures and where we have only general authority to act in harmony with what the Bible tells us. Things in this category amount to opinion. We should recognize that not all opinions are of equal value. Some people do a better job thinking through and forming opinions than others do. Still, people who prize unity will not allow opinions to become the source for strife and contention within the body of Christ. In areas like this, the good judgment of elders becomes very important because it allows them to build consensus and resolve differences of opinion in a way that avoids disruption to the Lord’s work.

Trivial matters can hurt the unity of the body, but it is usually the more serious issues of interpreting what the Bible says that do more significant damage. Here is where it is extremely important that we all understand that we can be united in mind and judgment. It may not always be easy. In fact, maintaining unity of thought requires that we put forth a great deal of effort and time to acquire the skills needed so we can be certain that we are interpreting the inspired text in the correct way. None of us should attempt to bind his view on anyone else until he has studied the issue thoroughly, and is completely convinced that it is biblically correct. This leads us to the critical question in this discussion: *How can we know our understanding of Scriptural teaching is correct?* The following three ideas may be helpful as we try to answer that question.

**We can be confident that we are correct when we have studied diligently what the Scripture says.** “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). This means that we are going to know the subject thoroughly. Truth does not contradict itself, so the student needs to consider all the Bible teaches on the subject. There is no substitute for the discipline and hard work required in actually *knowing* what the Bible says. No shortcuts give satisfactory results if we want to be sure that our conclusions are right.

Do not settle for “off the cuff” explanations that may or may not be true to Bible teaching. It is easy

enough to pop off an opinion and even sound reasonably intelligent while doing so. However, unlearned opinions can never take the place of sound Bible exegesis.

Be careful that your view does not pit scripture against scripture. A single statement in the Bible can be divorced from the whole context of Bible teaching on a subject and lead to conclusions that make the Bible conflict with itself. This amounts to *wresting*, or twisting, the word of God to suit our own purposes (2 Pet. 3:16).

**We can be confident that we are correct when we have honestly considered alternative interpretations.** The Bereans mentioned in Acts 17:11 serve as a model for us. They listened eagerly to what Paul taught even though it was likely quite different from anything they had heard before. They were willing to change their views if they could be convinced that something different was in fact God’s truth. But before accepting what they heard, they compared it with the standard they knew to be true. They *searched the Scriptures*. When they found that Paul was speaking the word of God, many of them believed (Acts 17:12). In any matter of doctrinal disagreement, we need to go through this process. Listen to opposing points of view. Consider them fairly in light of what the Bible teaches. Be willing to change if, and only if, you become convinced that you have been wrong.

**We can be confident that we are correct when we are able to refute faulty interpretations with Scripture and convince people who have both open minds and mature judgment.** Our aim is not simply to agree to disagree. We want to help others come to a correct understanding of God’s truth. Thus, we need to be modern-day Aquilas and Priscillas (Acts 18:27). That requires us to be able use the Bible to show people why they have previously believed error.

Apollos was an eloquent speaker who is described as “mighty in the scriptures.” Yet, he lacked understanding because he knew only about the baptism of John. He needed to be taught about baptism in the name of Christ. Apollos had been a teacher of error even though he had been working with the best of motives. He needed correction and, to his credit, he appears to have received that correction and begun to speak the truth. That Aquila and Priscilla persuaded Apollos to change gives strong evidence that what they told him was correct.

Unity among believers is extremely important. We need to be one in thought and in judgment as we work together in the body of Christ. When we disagree about what the Bible says or what it means, let us be committed to working toward a common understanding based on what the word of God actually says.

*John preaches for the Sneaed Antioch church of Christ  
In Boaz, AL*

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Church of Christ  
 PO Box 251  
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 Fulton County Gospel News  
 PO Box 251**

**Mammoth Spring, AR 72554**

Editor - Barry O'Dell  
 Phone - (870) 625-3217  
 E-mail - cocfcgn@centurytel.net  
 FCGN Website:

www.fultoncountygospelnews.org

Church Website:

www.mammothspringchurchofchrist.com

***Biblical Worship***  
***-Colossians 3:17-***

1. Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24)
2. Prayer (Acts 12:5; Phil. 4:6-7)
3. Vocal music only (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:15)
4. Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7-8)
5. Preaching (Acts 2:47; 20:7)

***The Churches of Christ***

1. Bible only (Rom. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:3)
2. Name (Rom. 16:16)
3. Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
4. Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
5. Purchased with blood (Acts 20:28)
6. Established in 1st century (Acts 2:47)
7. Body of Christ and Christ alone is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23)
8. Added to the church today just as in the 1st century (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13)

***Salvation***

1. Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
2. Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
3. Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
4. Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
5. Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)

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