

Spring/Summer  
2022

A large, stylized letter 'E' in gold and dark grey, with a white swoosh underneath, positioned above the main title.

# ENGAGE

A Journal for  
Church of God Ministries

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- Churches Returning to Normal
- Will We Know Friends in Heaven?
- Talking About Faith
- A Historic General Assembly





# ENGAGE

A Journal for Church of God Ministries

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**From the Editor** | Cameron Fisher

# "The Assembly Is Finally 'Gonna' Happen!"

**W**hen General Overseer Tim Hill adjourned the 77th Assembly in Orlando—way back in August 2018—all minds were trained on the next destination: Indianapolis, Indiana.

Preparations were already underway for Indy 2020, such as contractual agreements with the city, convention center, and hotels. By March 2020, hundreds of delegates had already registered and the work of several GA20 committees was fully underway. As we all know, later that month the world changed and a series of events led to where we are today—four years removed from that gavel drop of 2018. Arrival at this point in Church of God history has indeed been historic. Portions of the saga are recalled in a feature in this issue, along with information about what's on tap for San Antonio in July.

The above title phrase has been uttered a few times in Communications, a department at the International Offices driven toward production and management of the event that is such a focus every two years. The nuts and bolts of registration, hotels, media, production, publications, social media, and the website are part of everyday office procedures in Communications. And it's all ramping up as we head toward that week in San Antonio.

If you have not signed up for GA22, please visit [ga22.org](http://ga22.org) to find out how to register and other items pertinent to a pleasant Assembly experience. We look forward to seeing you in Texas when the event "finally happens." ■



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# More Churches Returning to Normal Operations

## In-person Attendance Unchanged Since Fall

By Justin Nortey

As COVID-19 cases continue to decline and pandemic restrictions are eased across the United States, churches and other houses of worship increasingly are holding services the way they did before the outbreak began, according to a new Pew Research Center survey. But there has not been a corresponding rise over the past six months in the share of Americans who are attending in-person services.

Among U.S. adults who say they attend religious services, 43% now report that their house of worship is currently open and holding services the same way it did before the COVID-19 outbreak—up 14 percentage points in the last six months and 31 points since last March. Meanwhile, 47% say their congregation is open but with modifications still in place due to the pandemic, such as mask requirements or social distancing.

Just 5% say their congregation is still completely closed to in-person worship, unchanged since September of last year (6%). In other words, the overall share of U.S. worshipers who say their congregation is open to in-person services has not increased over the last six months, but



fewer people say their services include coronavirus-related precautions.

The same survey shows that attendance at in-person services—which grew steadily from July 2020 through September 2021—has plateaued, as has the share of adults watching religious services online or on TV.

In July 2020, roughly four months after COVID-19 upended life in America, 13% of U.S. adults reported having attended religious services in person during the previous month. That figure rose to 17% in March 2021 and then to 26% in September 2021, and now stands at 27%.

Over the same period, the share of Americans who say they have streamed religious services online or watched them on TV in the past month declined from 36% in July 2020 to 28% in September 2021 and is now 30%.

About a third of U.S. adults (32%) in the new March survey say they *typically* go to religious services at least once or twice a month. Of these self-described regular attenders, two-thirds (67%) report that they actually have attended physically (in person) in the last month, while 57% say



they have watched services online or on TV during that period.

The survey's questions about in-person and virtual attendance can be combined to provide a sense of how many people are watching services online *instead* of attending in person, and how many are watching online *in addition* to attending in person. The Center's survey finds that among all adults who say they typically attend services at least monthly, 36% have both attended in person and watched services digitally in the last month, while three-in-ten (31%) say they have only attended in person but not watched online or on TV in the last month.

One-in-five (21%) may still be substituting virtual attendance for in-person attendance, saying they recently have watched religious services online or on TV but have not attended in person. Just 12% of self-described regular attenders report that they have neither gone in person nor watched services virtually in the last month.

Assessing the impact of the pandemic on religious service attendance remains difficult for two main reasons. One is that the ultimate course of the pandemic is still unclear. What appears, at this moment, to be a plateau in religious service attendance could be followed by a rise if the pandemic gradually recedes, or by a drop if a new, highly infectious coronavirus variant emerges.

The second reason for uncertainty is that, prior to the pandemic, Pew Research Center surveys did not clearly distinguish between physical attendance at religious services and virtual attendance. While

religious congregations as a whole may have experienced a large drop in physical attendance during the pandemic, there's good reason to believe that virtual attendance is much higher today than it was before the coronavirus outbreak began in early 2020. One piece of evidence is that, in a July 2020 survey, 18% of U.S. adults said that since the pandemic began, they had watched religious services online or on TV *for the first time*. Combining both forms of attendance, nearly nine-in-ten people who say they are regular attenders (88%) report that they have participated one way or the other in religious services in the past month.

In addition, the share of *all U.S. adults* who say they have either attended religious services in person or watched online or on TV (or both) in the past month (43%) is substantially greater than the share who say they typically attend religious services at least once or twice a month (32% among all March 2022 survey respondents). This suggests that people's actual behavior may vary from month to month, or that some people may not think of online services when answering the question about their typical attendance.

The new study, like previous surveys, finds notable differences in attendance patterns across Christian subgroups. For example, Protestant churchgoers in the historically black tradition stand out for being the Christian group most likely to have *only* watched religious services online or on TV in the last month, with about a third (35%) describing their behavior this way.



Indeed, while black Americans are, on average, more religious than white and Hispanic Americans by a number of religious commitment measures, churchgoers in the historically Black Protestant tradition (48%) are substantially less likely than evangelical Protestants (75%), mainline Protestants (68%) and Catholics (69%) to say they have attended religious services in person in the last month. (Other surveys show that the pandemic has hit communities of color especially hard.)

Meanwhile, among those who typically attend religious services at least monthly, Protestants in the historically black tradition (73%) are *more* likely than evangelical (64%) and mainline (56%) Protestants to say they have watched services virtually in the last month, and all of these groups are more likely than Catholics (40%) to say they have done so. Mainline Protestant churchgoers stand out for rising rates of in-person attendance, with the share saying they have attended a service in the last month increasing by 12 points since September 2021 (from 56% to 68%).

Although the survey was conducted among Americans of all religious backgrounds, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus, it did not obtain enough respondents from non-Christian groups to report separately on their responses. Small subgroups of Christians are unable to be analyzed separately for the same reason.

When it comes to the operating status of congregations, a majority of evangelical Protestants who typically attend religious services at least monthly or

say they attended in person in the past month (60%) say their church is open and holding services in the same way it did before the pandemic began. Evangelicals are significantly more likely than mainline Protestants (33%) and Catholics (43%) to say this is the case. Among Protestants in the historically black tradition, just 21% say their congregation is open and operating normally, while roughly two-thirds (65%) say their church is open but with changes or restrictions still in place due to the pandemic.

Among religious attenders, the share of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who say their house of worship is currently open and operating the way it did before the pandemic is roughly double the share of Democratic congregants who say the same (58% vs. 27%). Democrats (and Democratic leaners) who regularly attend religious services are much more likely than their Republican counterparts to report that their house of worship is open but operating with pandemic-induced changes in place (60% vs. 37%).

Republicans who typically attend religious services also are much more likely than Democrats in the same category to say they have attended religious services in person in the last month (77% vs. 58%). But members of both parties are equally likely to say they recently have watched services online or on TV (57% each). ■

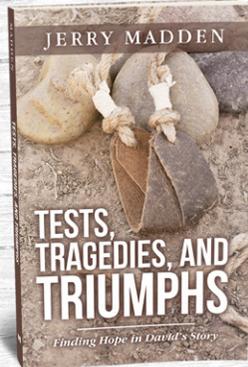
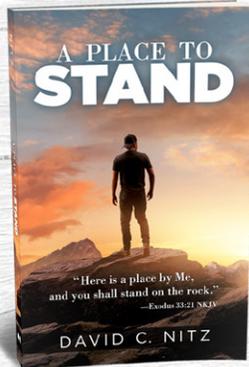
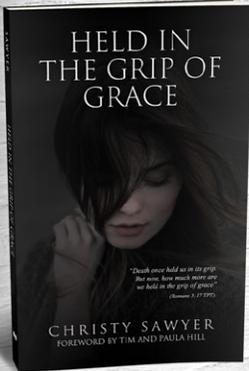
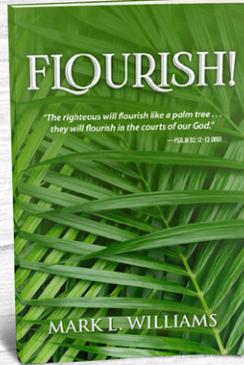
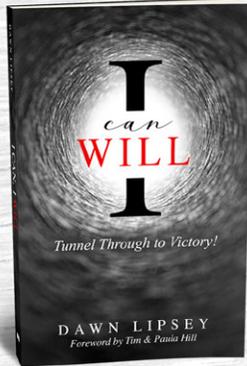
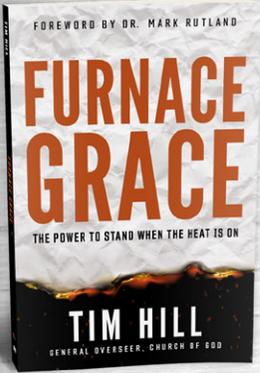
*Justin Nortey is a research assistant focusing on religion research at Pew Research Center.*

(Source: Pew Research Center. This article was originally published on March 22, 2022, in Christian Newswire)



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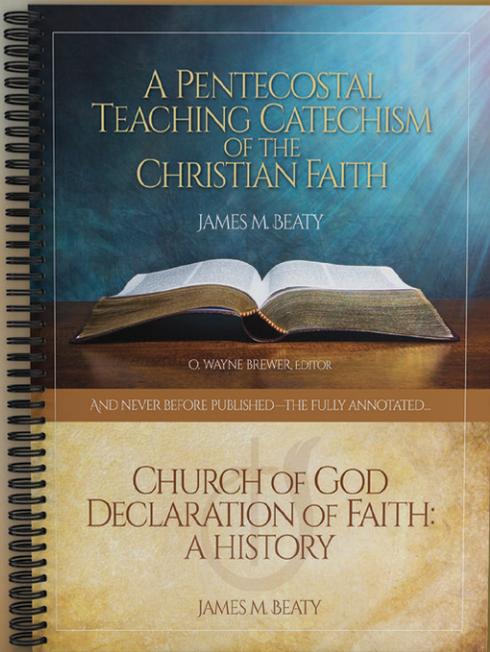
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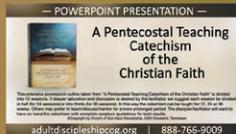
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# Historic Assembly Set for San Antonio, July 25-29, 2022

By Cameron Fisher

*After a two-year postponement, delegates will gather for the 78<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly of the Church of God.*



**F**ollowing a two-year postponement due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the 78<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly (GA22) is now just weeks away, with final preparations being readied for delegates to arrive in San Antonio, Texas.

By the time the gavel falls opening the first day of business for the General Council, it will have been four years since the last Assembly took place in Orlando in 2018. When General Overseer Tim Hill adjourned the 77<sup>th</sup> Assembly, no one knew the journey that was to come.

That journey began when Hill, three members of the Executive Committee, their spouses, and a delegation of 30 others were in Israel from March 1-10, 2020—the culmination of months of planning

for the “Journey of Pentecost” tour. Landing in Atlanta on Tuesday, March 10, the group had been so engaged with the Holy Land experience that hardly anything outside of God’s Word being brought to life had been discussed.

Before Hill and the Executive Committee could unpack their bags, the reality of an approaching pandemic was upon them. On Thursday, March 12, the University of Tennessee canceled all events in their Thompson-Boling Arena. The shutdown forced the decision to cancel Winterfest, the day before thousands of young people were set to be gathered at the venue. Some youth groups were already en route when the news broke.



Cancellation of Winterfest 2020 was the first of several difficult decisions to come. As Covid-19 spread around the globe, out of an abundance of caution, Church of God congregations transitioned to “church in the parking lot” and/or online only. The International Offices shut their doors for several weeks of remote work. Camp meetings and youth camps were closed that summer. The International Executive Council, scheduled to meet in Cleveland in April 2020 to finalize the agenda for the 2020 Assembly, instead met via Zoom and debated the harsh reality of what to do about the 78<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

While most events that year were canceled, the 2020 Assembly was instead *postponed*. Initial discussion centered on moving it to 2021, but availability of cities just one year later with venues large enough to accommodate a gathering the size of the Assembly were extremely limited; not to mention the fact that no one knew how Covid would look in summer 2021. Tentative dates with San Antonio had already been negotiated for the 79<sup>th</sup> Assembly, so locating the 78<sup>th</sup> to the Texas city was a logical choice.

The historic aspect of GA22 comes in a variety of forms. Postponement has happened only once in Church of God history; ironically, also for a pandemic back in 1918. Because of World War II, the 1945 Assembly was for bishops only. The last four years between 2018 and 2022 is the largest gap between Assemblies since the first in 1906.

Without a time or place to gather and conduct church business, the 2020–2022

period has essentially been a “hold in place” for elected and appointed leadership positions in the Church of God. During GA22, the General Council and General Assembly will decipher the process to move us through the challenges that the postponement created.

Agenda items from 2018 that were deferred, as well as motions made to deal with in 2020 will be brought to the table in 2022. Items obtained from Global Ministry Forums conducted in 2019 were intended to be agenda material for 2020. Anything that would normally arise during the 2020–2022 period will be part of the agenda as well. Add to the above the dilemmas the pandemic created, including the aforementioned leadership situations, and you have the makings for an extremely tight agenda.

That agenda is scheduled for release on June 15, 2022, to allow members of the General Council to become acquainted with the issues. *Previous Notice* items, which require a 90-day advance release, were distributed on April 27.

\*\*\*

When the last week of July arrives later this year, the 78<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly will be a time of both celebration and thankfulness as the Lord has guided our steps through a trying period. For the most part, the activities and schedule will reflect past General Assemblies with special events, reunions, exhibits, business sessions, and dynamic praise and worship.

While GA22 doesn’t officially begin until the opening session of the General



Council on Tuesday, July 26, there will be several activities on Monday, July 25, including a full day of Assembly registration and opening of the exhibit hall at 9:00 am. The popular LEAD Conference takes place from 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. in the Lila Cockrell Theater, on the river level of the Gonzalez Convention Center. LEAD is free to all delegates registered for GA22, but seating is limited. Confirmed speakers include Tod Bolsinger, senior congregational strategist and associate professor of Leadership Formation at Fuller Seminary; Amanda Crabb, pastor and co-founder of Crabb Ministries International; Maury Davis, a “coach, consultant, and pastor,” and Larry Stockstill, author and founder of Pastors University.

The first session of General Council on Tuesday morning will look different. Traditional nominations of the Executive Committee and Youth and Discipleship positions will first require discussion of how the two-year “hold in place” should affect tenure limitations. Once a motion is adopted, a special session of the General Assembly will be convened to take action on the motion before nominations can proceed. That called session is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday morning and will be open to all registered delegates aged 16 and older.

Tuesday afternoon will continue with General Council business. Tuesday evening, delegates will gather for praise and worship and General Overseer Hill will deliver an opening address. On Wednesday morning, General Council continues, while upstairs in the “Stars of the Night” Ballroom, the International Women’s

Ministries Service will take place, highlighted by music and a message from Amanda Crabb.

General Council sessions convene in the mornings and afternoons through Friday, where business will be voted upon by the General Assembly Business Session beginning at 2:30 p.m. On Wednesday evening, the featured speaker will be Gabriel Salguero, president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, while Thursday evening’s World Missions emphasis will include the traditional Parade of Nations and a keynote message from Jennifer Porter Cox, evangelist and co-pastor of the Shepherd’s House in Ft. Washington, MD. Friday evening will be led by the Executive Committee and feature a tribute to our ministers who have gone on to their rewards, and a commissioning of leaders.

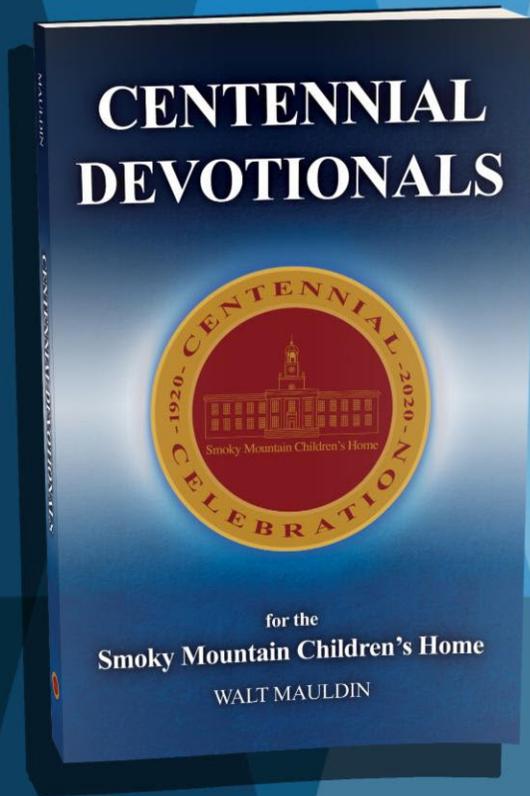
All during the week, prayer, led by Prayer Coordinator Doug Small, will be taking place on the second level. Kid’s Day Camp and Children’s Church will also be located on the second level. There will be many of the traditional gatherings, including World Missions, chaplains, and educators, as well as reunions for alumni of Lee University and Pentecostal Theological Seminary. As events are finalized, they will appear on [ga22.org](http://ga22.org), where there is complete information on hotels, registration, and the San Antonio area. Deadline for early bird online registration is June 17, 2022. ■

*Cameron Fisher is Communications Coordinator for the Church of God.*

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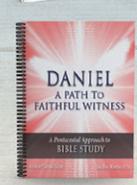
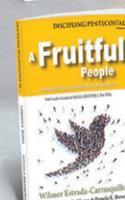
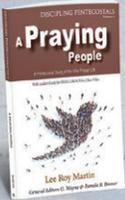
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<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>August</u>
<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>5 Weeks</b>	<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>5 Weeks</b>
"Understanding & Destroying Strongholds" <small>(Chapter 8-9 from "Fighting The Good Fight")</small>	"Galatians - Path To Freedom" (12 wks) . . . or "Daniel - Faithful Witness Bible Study" (10 wks) . . . or "Romans Vol. 1 - Path To Transformation" (10 wks) . . . AND 1 or 2 Weeks, "Surviving Spiritual Abortion" (Chapter 10 from "Fighting the Good Fight")		
<u>September</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>November</u>	<u>December</u>
<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>First 3 Weeks</b>
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# Will We Know Our Friends in Heaven?

By J. Lee Grady



Last year was painful for me because I lost three good friends. Robert died of lymphoma in February, Fernando died in November after a heart attack, and James died a week later of heart failure. All three men left grieving wives and families behind.

To cope with my grief, I looked at photos and wrote down memories. But it was hard. James and I talked or texted almost every day, so it was surreal to see his number in my phone with no “What’s up, bud?” or “You doin’ OK?” messages from Alabama.

One thing that helped me in the grieving process was meditating on the

reality of eternal life. The Bible tells us if our loved ones were believers in Jesus, they go immediately into God’s presence in heaven when they die.

We love to tell our grieving friends and relatives, “He’s in a better place” or “She’s enjoying heaven now.” But those words don’t always help me. That’s great for them, but what about those of us here on earth who are missing them? I know my friend James is in heaven, but I can’t text him there. My phone plan with AT&T doesn’t include coverage in glory. (I would pay extra for that!)

What encourages me most is not that my friends are in the arms of Jesus, but



that when this world as we know it ends, I will be with my Christian friends again. Some Christians have a weird idea that heaven is a dreamy place, more shadow than substance. They imagine we will be disembodied spirits, floating around in white robes while choirs sing 24 hours a day.

Some Christians even believe we will have new identities and our memories of this earth will be erased. We would do well to read the last chapters of the Bible and recognize God has so much more in store for us than that. The final words of Revelation remind us of these truths:

### **This world will be reborn.**

After God judges the wickedness of humanity at the end of time, He will remake this earth and bring heaven down to this domain. It will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1b)—a paradise as at the time of creation. The new earth will have trees, animals, roads, and indescribable beauty. And the new, heavenly city of Jerusalem will be its capital.

### **We will live and work with each other in a new world.**

Revelation 21:24 says “the nations” will walk by the perpetual light of the Son of God, who will rule from His eternal throne. There will be nations in the new earth. We will live as citizens of God’s glorious kingdom in a world where there is no war, violence, tears, pain, viruses, or death (see 21:4). The Bible doesn’t specify what kind of work we will do, but those who have been faithful to God in this life will be involved in management of the new world.

### **We will maintain our identities.**

We will have new bodies (1 Corinthians 15:49), but that doesn’t mean we won’t be ourselves. Jesus said when we are in the new earth we will “recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Matthew 8:11b, NASB). These great heroes of faith will still be themselves—and so will we.

I will be myself; you will be yourself; and we will have the opportunity to meet saints who lived in different time periods. I am personally eager to schedule appointments with Paul, Timothy, John, Ruth, Mark, Luke, Lazarus, and Mary Magdalene, as well as Christians whose writings encouraged me.

### **We will continue our friendships in the next life.**

When Jesus shared the Passover meal with His closest friends, He said, “I will never eat [this meal] again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16b TLV). Jesus was clearly stating that He would reunite with His disciples and they would fellowship together again.

When this world ends, true believers in Christ are invited to the greatest party ever celebrated. I’m sure the food and the music will be amazing, but the joy will be uncontainable because our friends and relatives who loved the Lord will be in the crowd. We will dance, hug, laugh, and visit each other’s new homes. And I plan to enjoy coffee—or some new, heavenly beverage—with Robert, Fernando, and James. ■

*J. Lee Grady is former editor of Charisma magazine*



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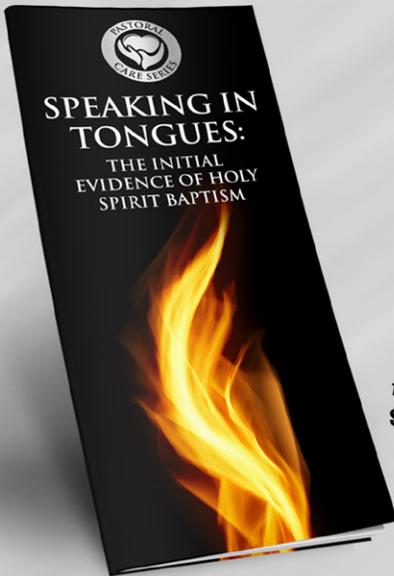
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# Most Americans Are Open or Very Open to Talking About Faith

In a new study, Lifeway Research Group, in partnership with Evangelism Explosion International, interviewed more than 1,000 Americans to find out how open they are to talking about their faith. They found that 66 percent were open or very open to having a conversation about faith with a friend. When the question changed from friend to stranger, 51 percent were still open to that conversation.

The study also asked questions to gauge the availability that Americans have to the gospel through personal connections. It found that six out of ten people say that many of their friends who claim to be Christians rarely talk about their faith. Also, it found that 40 percent say they wouldn't think about faith on their own if a friend or family member did not bring it up. Males aged 18-34 were the most likely to agree to that statement.

When asked if they would want to hear why someone thinks their faith helps with a core human need, 69 percent of Americans said, yes.

"Now, perhaps more than ever, people are open to conversations about faith, yet few Christians actually take the opportunity to engage in personal evangelism," says Dr. John B. Sorensen, President and CEO of Evangelism Explosion International.

Interestingly, the study asked about various methods of evangelism. Social media, pamphlets, and apps were all deterrents in conversations about faith. About one in three people were less interested when those materials were introduced. Conversely, when the conversation was personal,

Americans were more interested. When meeting someone new, 69 percent say they are open or very open to hearing their life story if it includes faith.

"Our mission at EE is to equip Christians to have the confidence to share the gospel naturally, lovingly, and intentionally with family, friends, and yes, even strangers," says Sorensen. "We imagine a world where every believer is a witness for Christ to His Glory."

Evangelism Explosion International, founded sixty years ago, trains Christians how to share their faith by asking two diagnostic questions as a start to a conversation about faith:

- (1) Do you know for certain that if you were to die tonight, you would be with God in heaven?
- (2) Suppose you were standing before God and He were to ask you, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" what would you say?

When asked those two questions, Lifeway found that 80 percent of Americans say that it is important to have certainty, while only 38 percent said it is because of their trust in Jesus Christ alone.

Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38 NKJV). ■

*(This article originally appeared February 23, 2022. Source: Evangelism Explosion International.)*

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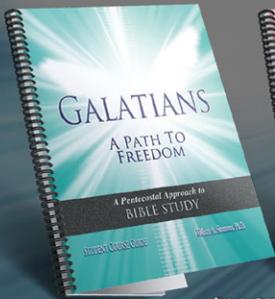
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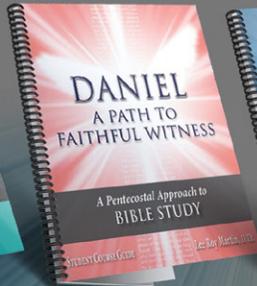
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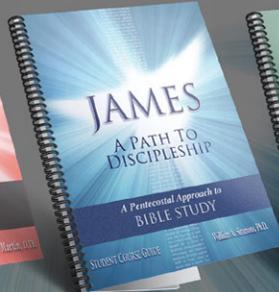
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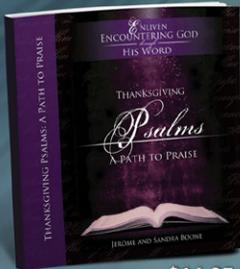
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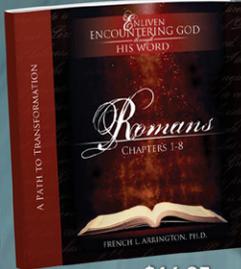
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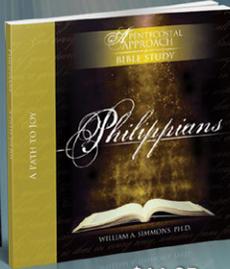
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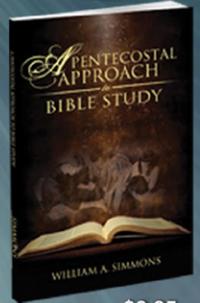
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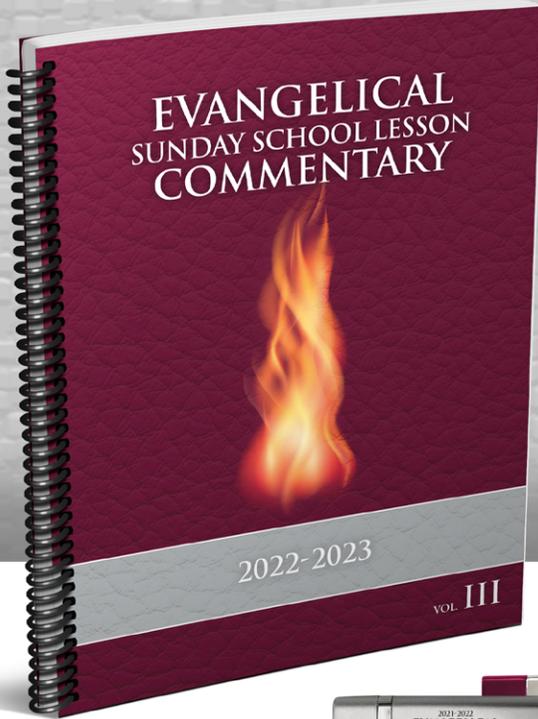
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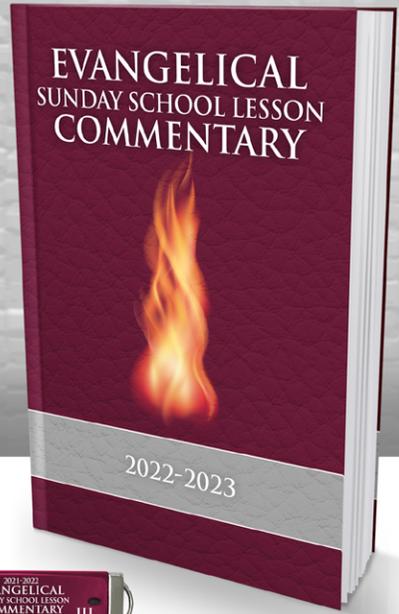


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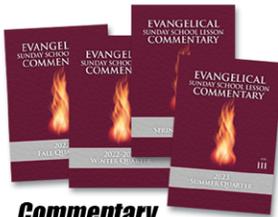
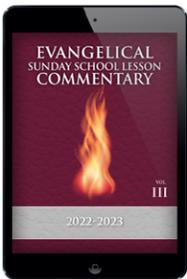


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# New Study Reveals Generational Gaps in Evangelical Charitable Giving



**E**vangelical Protestant donors under age 40 are extremely different from their older counterparts, especially when compared with evangelical donors 70 and older.

The findings are detailed in *The Generation Gap: Evangelical Giving Preferences*. The study of more than 1,000 American evangelical Protestants was released today by Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts.

Fifty-eight percent of evangelical Protestants give money to charities or ministries outside of their church. These donors were asked their preferences in eight different areas regarding giving. In every one of those eight areas, preferences vary substantially by age.

Overall, evangelicals favor the following:

- Giving domestically more than overseas (46% to 27%, with the remaining 27% expressing no preference)
- Trusting an organization until it proves unworthy of their trust more than doubting an organization until it proves it is trustworthy (48% to 33%)
- Supporting organizations they already know rather than learning about new organizations (58% to 28%)
- Supporting a small number of causes over a wide variety (58% to 31%)
- Supporting a small number of organizations over a wide variety (62% to 27%)



- Doing research on an organization over giving “when it feels right” (53% to 33%)
- Doing advance planning regarding their giving over donating “spur of the moment” (47% to 34%)
- In giving locally versus beyond their local area, preferences are split (37% to 36%)

However, the study found that younger donors usually see things very differently. For instance, they prefer overseas over domestic; they want to spread their money around to more organizations and causes; and like to learn about new organizations more than older donors.

Mark Dreistadt, founder and president of Infinity Concepts, summarizes younger evangelical donors as unique compared to other age groups. “Younger donors have a much more international focus. They seek variety in their giving. They are less trusting, but they do less planning or research. Unlike older donors, younger donors are a mix of perspectives rather than a strong common voice. Not only that, but they feel less strongly about their perspectives than do older donors.”

Ron Sellers, president of Grey Matter Research, notes older people are still the core donors for many organizations. But, looking toward the future, many ministries and charities are making a strong push to reach younger donors. “What leaders need to realize is that they can’t effectively reach the 35-year-old donor with the same strategy they used to reach their 65-year-old donors,” Sellers explains.

The report states it is unknown whether younger donors will change their

perspectives or carry some/all of these unique perspectives with them as they age into being core donors for nonprofits. But Dreistadt and Sellers both say if younger donors remain consistent in their preferences it may mean the landscape becomes quite different for organizations.

“Organizations may need to provide more variety in programs and messaging in order to retain these donors,” Sellers says.

They may find it harder to attract people who value variety to monthly donor programs or long-term relationships, but there may be more opportunities for short-term growth. Nonprofits and ministries may need to focus more on building trust rather than assuming it already exists. Marketing and messaging may need to have a more emotional focus for people who give spur of the moment.

Dreistadt adds, “In short, if younger donors stay consistent with their current preferences, the fundraising landscape may be considerably different in the future.”

Definition of “Evangelical Protestant”  
This study uses the definition of “evangelical” favored by the National Association of Evangelicals, based on four key spiritual beliefs. ■

**The Authors:**

*Infinity Concepts is America's premier Christian brand communications and fundraising agency serving clients worldwide.*

*Grey Matter Research is a marketing research and consumer insights company with extensive experience serving the charitable and faith-based sectors.*

(SOURCE: Infinity Concepts via Christian Newswire)

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## LEGAL NOTES

DENNIS WATKINS

# Insurance Issues for Churches: Basic Observations



## Introduction

If I could write or talk about only one legal issue for churches, the most important one, in my opinion, would be the issue of insurance. This might be surprising, but it is astonishing sometimes to see the mistakes that are made in this area of management for churches. It would be wise for all our ministers and church administrators to acquaint themselves more fully with this subject. It is sad to witness a church have no insurance or too little insurance when it needs it the most, which is usually after a negative event.

While there are many sub-issues that exist touching this subject, I will speak to some of the more common areas that need attention.

## Church Insurance Contracts

Church insurance contracts are very complex documents, and someone in your church needs to make it his/her duty to be fully aware of the church's coverage. Remember the general rule regarding insurance contracts, which is, *"The bold print giveth, and the fine print taketh away."* Page 1 of an insurance contract will say something like, "This



policy covers all events, unless excluded.” Then many more pages are added to the policy, covering the exclusions to the policy’s coverage.

### **Know Your Declaration Sheet**

In almost all insurance policies, including church insurance policies, there is a sheet known as the “Declaration Page” or some variation thereof. The purpose of this part of the policy is to itemize and set out a summary of the types and amounts of coverage contained in the policy. The importance of this page cannot be overstated because it advises the policy holder as to how much coverage is available for any event covered under the policy. It should be your goal to master the contents of this page. Incidentally, you likely will find a similar page for your personal insurance policies as well.

### **Does your carrier insure churches on a large scale?**

There are many insurance companies that can write a good commercial insurance policy. However, insuring churches carries its own nuances, and for that reason, I recommend that the agent or carrier should be in the business of insuring churches on a large scale. There are companies that insure only churches. For example, our carrier for the Church is Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

### **General Liability Coverage**

Church insurance policies are basically a “package” of separate insurance policies packaged together. But one of the foremost types of coverage is known

as “general liability coverage.” This provides the church with insurance protection for the typical types of occurrences that we think about, such as accidents, injuries, or other unexpected events that can occur during church activities. One of the most important features of this type of coverage is that it usually includes payment of legal fees and defense costs. Remember, even a frivolous legal case against a church can engender legal fees and costs of many thousands of dollars.

How much liability coverage should your policy contain? The answer to this question can vary under the circumstances, and there may be minimum coverage requirements in your state, but even coverage in the amount of \$1 million or \$2 million would not be adequate in some circumstances. Therefore, I also recommend that churches obtain as much coverage as possible and consider asking your agent about additional “umbrella” coverage.

### **Conclusion**

There is an old saying that goes, “Insurance is great until you need it.” Just remember that by educating yourself and remaining diligent about knowing your church insurance policy, you can go a long way in providing proper risk management for your church. ■

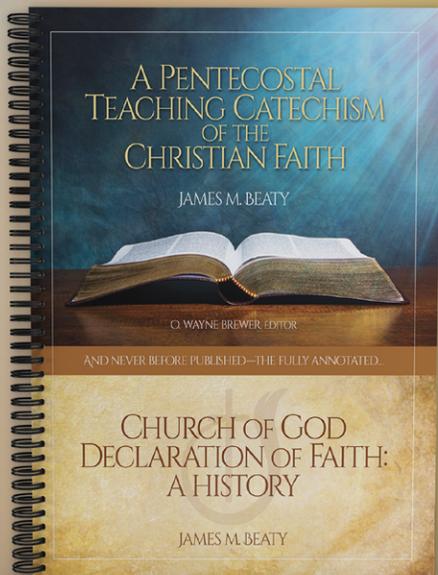
*Dennis Watkins is legal counsel for the Church of God. The writer is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services herein. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.*

*Special thanks to Grace Tinsley and Kayla Foley for their assistance in writing this article.*

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# Student Loan Forgiveness Available to Ministers and Church Employees

**D**ue to a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, the U.S. Department of Education has overhauled the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF) to extend student loan forgiveness to employees of churches and other faith-based organizations. By forgiving direct student loans after ten years of “public service,” PSLF is designed to remove the burden of student debt on those working for the public interest.

To qualify for the PSLF, you must:

1. *Work for a qualifying employer.* The definition of a “qualifying employer” now includes religious not-for-profit organizations such as congregations, religious schools and camps, seminaries, etc.
2. *Work full time for the organization.* For PSLF purposes, you are generally considered to work full time if you meet your employer’s definition of full time or work at least 30 hours per week, whichever is greater. Hours from qualifying employers can be combined.
3. *Have federal student loans through the Direct Loan Program.* A waiver gives



borrowers who have loans through other federal programs until October 31, 2022, to consolidate these loans into the Direct Loan Program.

4. *Have repaid your loans under a qualifying monthly payment plan while you were working full time for a qualifying employer.* These are generally



income-based plans rather than “standard” or “graduated” payment plans.

5. *Have made 120 qualifying payments.* It should be noted that a payment waiver has been in effect during the pandemic (March 2020 through August 2022). Even if you did not make payments during this period, these months count toward the 120 qualifying payments.

It is important to remember that student loans from private lenders do not qualify for the PSLF forgiveness program. Further, the dollar amount of forgiven loans does not count as income to the individual for federal and most state income tax purposes.

The Department of Education recommends that borrowers use the *PSLF Help Tool* to walk through the application process.

Because you are required to make 120 qualifying monthly payments, it will take at least ten years of payments before you are eligible for PSLF. You must be working for a qualifying employer at the time you submit the application *and* at the time the remaining balance on your loan is forgiven.

According to the Department of Education, those who think they are eligible for PSLF should submit an application. The Department will use the application to determine if your loan payments qualify for the PSLF. If you work for more than one employer during the 10-year repayment period, you will need to prove that each employer meets program guidelines.

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF) can greatly reduce the federal student loan debt burden for many of those working within religious and faith-based organizations. However, determining whether you qualify, and then applying for forgiveness, can be complex.

To help our ministers and church-related employees navigate the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, the Church of God Benefits Board joined with other denominations who participate in the Financial Literacy Group of the Church Benefits Association to sponsor a webinar on this topic on January 26 and then a follow-up webinar on April 5. Both webinars, along with additional information and resources on the PSLF, can be found on the Benefits Board’s website at <https://www.benefits-board.com/pslf>.

The repayment of student loans often hinders those in ministry from being able to serve where they believe that God is leading them. Hopefully, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program will benefit all ministers and church-related workers and allow them to carry out God’s will and purpose for their lives. ■

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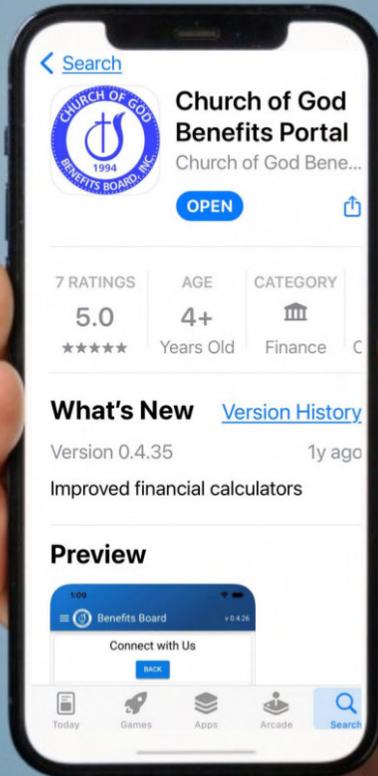
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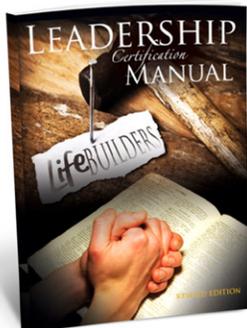
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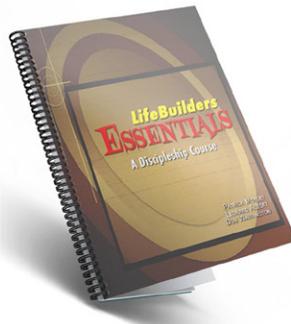


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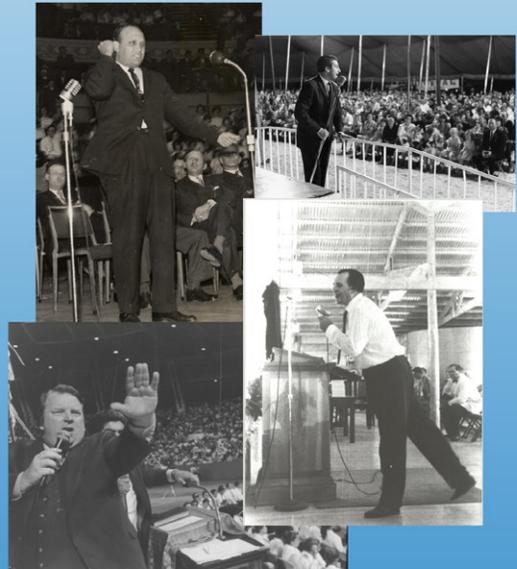
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## DOCTRINE AND POLITY

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# Are Women to Remain Silent in the Church?

In ways similar to 1 Timothy 2:8-15, the passage in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 admonishes women to be silent in the churches. While some scholars dismiss the 1 Timothy passage as later than Paul (and therefore non-Pauline), that is not the path that we have chosen to follow. Some scholars have wondered if the 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 passage is not by Paul but perhaps inserted by a later copyist. Others have seriously proposed that Paul is simply quoting statements by a group of Corinthians (vv. 34-35) in order to refute them (v. 36), as he had already done in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 7:1; and 10:23. We are attempting to ascertain the meaning of Paul's strong statements against women speaking aloud in the congregations in both 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians. Since one's view on these two verses has an impact on how one understands what Paul is saying about women overall, we will consider the various interpretations carefully.

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Or did the word of God

originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? (1 Cor. 14:34-36 NIV)

### Various Approaches to 1 Corinthians 14:34-36

Before we attempt to understand the meaning of this passage, we need to step back to deal with several ways that scholars approach this passage. These may be summarized as follows:

1. Issues with textual manuscripts (Is there an "interpolation" by later copyists?)
2. The Contradiction of 14:34-35 with 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (If women can prophesy and pray in church as in 11:2-5, then how can they do this and yet be silent?)
3. Is Paul quoting the Corinthians in vv. 34-35 and refuting them in v. 36? (also known as the "slogon hypothesis").

Let us consider these approaches one-by-one.

#### 1. Issues with Textual Manuscripts

Several prominent scholars have raised the question whether this passage



is an *interpolation* by a later copyist or scribe. An interpolation is an insertion of something of a different nature into a text. In this case, it refers to some scholars' belief that vv. 34-35 were written later by someone other than Paul and inserted between verses 33b and 37. What evidence exists for such an unusual view? First, it should be clear that no manuscript of the New Testament omits 14:34-35. Second—and importantly—there are manuscripts from the late 300s AD and following in which an entire “Western” tradition places vv. 34-35 at the end of the chapter, that is, *after v. 40*. What might cause a copyist to transfer a section of material from after v. 33 to after v. 40?

Apparently, the content did not seem to fit the flow of the argument. Within a discussion of prophecy and tongues, vv. 34-35 seemed out of place. Paul had been discussing the manifestation of gifts, but for two verses he shifted to talk about people. There is not a hint of the gifts in these two verses.<sup>1</sup> The Pentecostal scholar and textual critic of the New Testament, Gordon Fee, has noted that some prominent Western manuscripts

follow this tradition of placing vv. 34-35 *after v. 40*.<sup>2</sup> Such manuscripts mean that the Western (Latin) church had it this way for hundreds of years.<sup>3</sup> Along with the internal evidence of potential contradiction with Paul himself (in 1 Cor. 11) as well as not fitting the flow of the argument, Fee suggests that the evidence for vv. 34-35 being Pauline casts “considerable doubt on their authenticity.”<sup>4</sup>

What would be the significance of this proposal, if it were true? It would mean that some scribe thought it was important to impose the later ideals of limited involvement of women in the churches upon Paul's original text. Therefore, these verses would not be part of Paul's writings and as a result would not be a universal biblical mandate to follow today.

However, there is strong disagreement concerning this proposal among other scholars. In particular, Curt Niccum has disagreed with Philip Payne and Gordon Fee by pointing to Payne's proposals regarding the markings on manuscripts (called “*distigmai*”) as “untenable” and the overall approach of Fee regarding interpolation as wrong.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars

1 Gordon D. Fee, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 701.

2 These are manuscripts from about the late 300s AD to about 600 AD. They are D F G 88\* a b d f g

3 Fee, *Corinthians*, 701.

4 Fee, *Corinthians*, 699. This view is supported by the following NT scholars: Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James L. Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 247: “All things considered, this passage is best explained as a gloss introduced into the text...”; John Ruef, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth*, in *Westminster Pelican Commentaries*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 154, who suspects interpolation; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 246, 249, who notes that v. 37 links with 33a, not v. 36; Graydon F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1992), 184, who thinks it is better to view 34-35 as an addition from a later time; and Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 227-67, whose forty-page treatise on this subject is the most thorough argument to date.

5 Curt Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor. 14:34-5,” *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 242-55, here 243.



call the arguments for interpolation “not weighty”<sup>6</sup> or “limited” and “problematic.”<sup>7</sup> Even Fee admits that the earlier and more weighty manuscripts all place vv. 34-35 after v. 33b, not after v. 40.<sup>8</sup> Further, scholar Antoinette Clark Wire has noted that all the manuscripts cited by Fee seem to rest on a single tradition. In other words, when one sifts through the manuscript evidence, there remains only two “witnesses” of this tradition—and they appear to come from a single “common archetype” from which the later manuscripts were copied.<sup>9</sup> This means that a single text from the West may have been copied with the changes, thereby providing a pattern for later copies. However, this still does not explain why the same variances did not occur in the Greek (Eastern) textual tradition—one that is much older as well.

Nevertheless, problems remain with these verses. Interpolation may still be regarded as possible. As Gordon Fee concedes, “On the whole, therefore, the case against these verses is so strong, and finding a viable solution to their meaning so difficult, that it seems best to view them as an interpolation.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, there is still the “thorny” issue of what

these verses may mean in contrast to 1 Corinthians 11 where women are praying and prophesying. Don’t these words in vv. 34-35 seem to contradict 1 Corinthians 11:2-5?

## 2. Contradiction of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 with 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

This brings us to our next approach to understanding what Paul meant, namely the apparent contradiction between women praying/prophesying and women being silent in the churches. A number of proposals have been offered to ameliorate this apparent tension. Let’s consider them.

First, some have seen the meetings described in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14 as different in terms of type. For example, some see the meetings in 1 Corinthians 11 as *private meetings*—that is, informal gatherings for worship and perhaps teaching,<sup>11</sup> while the meetings in 1 Corinthians 14 were formal, “official” worship services for the church. Therefore, women “are allowed to prophesy but not when the congregation officially meets.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Paul had in mind different kinds

6 Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, in *Sacra Pagina Series*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 516.

7 Jill E. Marshall, *Women Praying and Prophesying in Corinth: Gender and Inspired Speech in First Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 203-04; also, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1148-50.

8 Fee, *Corinthians*, 699. These manuscripts include p<sup>46</sup> A B K Ψ 0243 33 81 and 1739Maj.

9 Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 149.

10 Fee, *Corinthians*, 705.

11 Fee, *Corinthians*, 703.

12 Frederik W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 341. “Women who have received the gift of prophecy, are not to use their *exousia* in the meetings of the church.”



of gatherings.<sup>13</sup> However, there is nothing in the texts that makes such a demarcation between the locations of the worship settings.<sup>14</sup>

Second, some have viewed the *kind of speech* of the two passages as different. Perhaps Paul was addressing a type of “chatter” in 1 Corinthians 14 that is different from “inspired speech” in 1 Corinthians 11. Perhaps Paul was providing admonition on a *specific* practice in Corinth that the readers understood, but from which we are too distant now to grasp.<sup>15</sup> This could be supported by v. 35 where Paul tells the women to “ask their own husbands at home” (see 1 Cor. 14:35 NIV). It appears, then, that some of the talk was disruptive of congregational worship. While the word here for “speak” [λαλεῖν | *lalein*] could mean “chatter” in ancient classical Greek, it rarely held that meaning in the *Koine* Greek of the New Testament.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not it was “chatter,” it was certainly disruptive.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps some

of the talking “may have been questioning out loud about what the last speaker said or meant.”<sup>18</sup> There seems some support in the text for this proposal, which we will consider more carefully later in the summary thoughts.

Third, some scholars suggest that Paul is addressing women in general in 1 Corinthians 11 and wives in particular in 1 Corinthians 14.<sup>19</sup> When the Greek word for “male” or “husband” (ἀνὴρ | *anēr*) is in close proximity to the Greek word for “woman” (γυνή | *gynē*), the latter term (*gynē*) usually means “wife.” It is suggested that this proximity is the case here in 1 Corinthians 14, but not in 1 Corinthians 11 where the context suggests male and female *in general*. C.K. Barrett reminds readers that married women in ancient Greece and Rome were frequently required to be silent—it was the custom of the culture that silence would reflect best on one’s husband.<sup>20</sup> Romans, Greeks, and Hellenistic Jews

13 PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians*, in Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament, ed. Mikeal C. Parsons and Charles H. Talbert (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 164; cf. also RUEF, *Paul’s First Letter to Corinth*, 155.

14 It could be noted here that A. J. Tomlinson in 1910 understood 1 Cor. 14:34-35 to prohibit women from speaking in business meetings of the church, but there is nothing in the text itself to point to this distinction. See “Further Study Report: Meaning and Usage of the Term ‘Bishop,’” Presented to the International General Council of the Church of God, 77<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2018), 21. See also “Should the Office of Bishop Be Available to Women Ministers in the Church of God?” in *A Study of the Issue of Women Serving as Ordained Bishops: Position Papers* (2006), 15-16.

15 MARION L. SOARDS, *1 Corinthians*, in New International Biblical Commentary, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 304-06.

16 SOARDS, *1 Corinthians*, 306; also, FEE, *Corinthians*, 703. However, Graydon Snyder suggests it could mean “prattle.” See Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 186.

17 FEE, *Corinthians*, 703.

18 ORR and WALTHER, *1 Corinthians*, 313.

19 RICHARD A. HORSLEY, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, ed. Victor Paul Furnish (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 189; also, WILLIAM F. ORR and JAMES A. WALTHER, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation*, The Anchor Bible, ed. William F. Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 312; cf. also SOARDS, *1 Corinthians*, 302.

20 CHARLES K. BARRETT, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in Black’s New Testament Commentary, ed. Henry Chadwick (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968), 331. Barrett notes Aristophanes’ comedy entitled *Ecclesiazusae*, where women take over the Athenian assembly and create chaos (and apparently a very rip-roaring comedy that played on the fact that women should not and could not take on such political work).



cited such cultural values.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the Corinthian women (the “enthusiasts” or the “spiritual ones”—*pneumatikoi*) were beginning to “blur distinctions” between men and women so Paul called them back to a more Jewish expectation of public behavior for women in the synagogue.<sup>22</sup> However, once again, we simply do not know which group Paul was considering here—and the linguistic evidence does not always give us the certitude we might desire.

Finally, some scholars suggest that women are allowed to pray and prophesy in 1 Corinthians 11, but in 1 Corinthians 14 they may not participate “in the oral weighing of such prophecies.”<sup>23</sup> In 1 Corinthians 14:29, Paul tried to place order on the delivery of prophecy by saying, “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully [διακρινέτωσαν | *diakrinētōsan*]<sup>24</sup> what is said” (NIV). Hence, in this view women

are allowed to exercise their ecstatic gifts but are banned from weighing or “sifting” the prophets’ messages.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps this was due to the rather universal belief in Greco-Roman society at the time that women were “softer of mind than a man and more subject to being flooded with emotion.”<sup>26</sup> Women were designated as an inferior species, similar to the male but less capable of intellectual or difficult work. For centuries before and after Paul’s time, medical descriptions of women had been along these lines: women are different from men in that they are loose and spongy in their flesh; their bodies soak up moisture because they are porous. A man’s body is firm and compact, not loose and spongy, and therefore is capable of greater intellectual and physical activity. Thus, is it proven that the female cannot do the same jobs as a male.<sup>27</sup> And so went the ancient line. These views of women certainly

21 C. H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (NY: Crossroad, 1987), 91-2. Talbert cites Livy (concerning Cato’s words), Juvenal (*Satires* 6), Philo (*Hypothetica*, 8.7.14) and Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.201). The wording in some of these citations and the underlying mentality toward women speaking in public seems to coincide rather nicely with vv. 34-35.

22 Collins, *First Corinthians*, 513-14.

23 D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 129. Carson notes that Thrall, Grudem and Hurley opt for this usage in 1 Cor. 14. See James B. Hurley, “Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 1 Cor. 14:33b-36,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 35, no. 2 (Winter 1973): 190-220.

24 Anthony Thiselton prefers the translation, “let them sift.” The idea is to “differentiate” or “distinguish between” so it probably refers to distinguishing between God-given prophecy and that which is not (“self-generated rhetoric,” as Thiselton calls it). See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1140.

25 Wayne Grudem suggests that since weighing prophecies would have verged into “teaching” territory and governing authority, in his opinion, this could not be allowed by Paul. See Wayne Grudem, “Prophecy—Yes, but Teaching—No: Paul’s Consistent Advocacy of Women’s Participation Without Governing Authority,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (March 1987): 20. It seems that Grudem limits his interpretation here in 1 Cor. 14 by how he has understood 1 Tim. 2:12.

26 This statement comes from Chrysostom in the early 400s A.D., but it had been the dominant belief since the days of Aristotle about 300 years before Christ. See Chrysostom, “Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, 37.1, in *1-2 Corinthians*, ed. and trans. Gerald Bray, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 143.

27 An excellent article on this is by Lesley Dean-Jones, “The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science,” *Women’s History & Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 114-5.



influenced the way people thought about public female participation in anything in society. When used by Grudem and others, it seems that they continue the problematic myth of female inadequacy by saying women could not be trusted to discern truth or weigh the evidence of spoken prophecies so the silence required is only concerning such “weighing carefully” what was said. The difficulty in this position is several fold:

- a) There is nothing in vv. 34-35 that says anything about the speech being focused only on weighing the prophecies just given;
- b) There is an assumption that Paul (and possibly the Corinthian men themselves) held to the belief that women were impaired cognitively whereas such a view does not seem to be supported anywhere in the New Testament or especially in Paul;<sup>28</sup>
- c) The admonition in v. 29 is located too far away for readers to make a clear connection with vv. 34-35 (especially without any words pointing to it); and finally
- d) The presupposition (of Grudem and others) is that women cannot teach and such evaluating would be teaching. Pentecostals, however, would find this limitation odd: if the Spirit can fill

a woman so that she overflows with prophetic utterance, then why can the Spirit not do the same by inspiring her to evaluate the words of others?

### 3. Is Paul quoting the Corinthians in vv. 34-35 and refuting them in v. 36?

A third group of interpreters understands these verses as Paul quoting some of the Corinthians’ sayings in order to refute them.<sup>29</sup> C.H. Talbert proposed this idea, noting that the rhetorical form of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, and 36 is dialogical.<sup>30</sup> According to this interpretation, Paul quotes the Corinthian “slogans” (as he has done three times previously in the letter) and then rejects their argument (v. 36). When Paul rebuts the Corinthian quote, he uses a disjunctive particle in Greek both times in v. 36: ἢ | ἔ, which means “or.” He does this twelve times in 1 Corinthians to argue against a Corinthian view.<sup>31</sup> However, why did Paul not introduce these words in vv. 34-35 as some false teaching or slogan of the Corinthians? Talbert suggests that the strange and “discordant note may be regarded as the position of Paul’s opponents.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the fact that Paul has addressed Corinthian “slogans” on previous occasions in the letter lends support for the idea

28 Indeed, one could argue convincingly that both Jesus and Paul opened the Christian faith to the participation of women. For only one example of such argumentation, see Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 290–3.

29 While Anthony Thiselton does not entirely land on this slogan approach, he does state that such a view is not “farfetched.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1150.

30 Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 92.

31 See Philip Payne’s succinct argument for and against this view in *Man and Woman*, 224; cf. also the discussion of this in Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 75.

32 Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 92.



that he may be doing it again here.<sup>33</sup> As Marion Soards states, while there is not a clear signal that this section is dialogical, the rebuttal proposal remains nonetheless “sensible and attractive.”<sup>34</sup>

According to this view (the “slogan hypothesis”),<sup>35</sup> the Corinthians were not allowing women to speak (“women should remain silent in the churches”) and were requiring them to “be in submission,” as the law says (1 Cor. 14:34). This is the first “slogan.” The second is similar but with a different basis: they should not ask questions in church, but learn at home from their husbands, for it is “disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (14:35). In verse 36, Paul begins with an extremely abrupt “Or” [ὃ | εἰ] did the word of God originate with you?” And again, “Or are you the only people it has reached?” (NIV). This proposal suggests that the “adversative” use of “or” here is a strong statement against the Corinthians’ views as proposed in vv. 34-35. However, Walter Liefeld argues that Paul was adversarial because of the Corinthians’ disobedience of the requirement in vv. 34-35, not because of some adversative “or.”<sup>36</sup> Also, Craig Keener observes that when Paul deals with the “slogans” elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, they are “at least partly affirmed, though seriously qualified.”<sup>37</sup> One would have expected

Paul to continue with that pattern here, but he does not.

## Summary Thoughts

At this point, readers may appropriately wonder what all of this textual consideration and conjecture has this to do with women in church leadership? While we have seen some relevant points pop up here and there, it is important to attempt to grasp the overall importance of our inquiry for the church today. What does all of this mean? If scholars, who spend their lifetimes researching this material, cannot agree on the meaning of this text then how can we discern what is the best interpretation? As one commentator said, “One finally cannot decide from the evidence available which of the several suggestions for interpretation is absolutely correct.”<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, we will need more than logic or reasoning—although we surely do need that. We will need the gift of discerning spirits, indeed, we will need the Holy Spirit himself to guide us into truth. What is the Spirit saying to the churches in the form of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35?

Allow us to submit a few key points that may be more than hypotheses along the way. These points seem to provide clarity to our grasp of what the Spirit was

33 See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor. 6:12-20,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1978): 391-396; also, see David W. Odell-Scott, “Let the Women Speak in Church: An Egalitarian Interpretation of 1 Cor. 14:33b-36,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13 (1983): 90-93; also, J. E. Smith, “Slogans in 1 Corinthians,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010): 68-88.

34 Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 304.

35 This phrase is from Jill E. Marshall, *Women Praying and Prophesying in Corinth*, 206, fn. 56.

36 Walter L. Liefeld, “Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Corinthians,” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 149.

37 Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 76.

38 Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 307.



saying through Paul and what the Spirit is saying to us today.

1. The values expressed in this passage may reflect some of the *cultural values* of the first-century Greco-Roman world. The question for us is this: did God intend Paul to write a rule about Christian living according to a societal rule about what females should not do according to first-century cultural expectations? Or is Paul addressing a particular cultural view (patriarchal) when he asks women to be silent? Noted New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington, points out that when we read this passage over against other Pauline passages (like Gal. 3:28), we must understand that Paul is speaking as a missionary to this setting. As Witherington suggests, Paul's "principle is to start where the people already are, not where he would like them to be."<sup>39</sup> Perhaps there is a universal principle here, but most NT scholars do not think it is that all women should be silent in the churches. (As we shall see in point 5 below, there may be a different more universal principle about worshipping together).
2. Whatever the prohibition against women speaking here, it cannot be a command against Spirit-filled women participating in worship (since 1 Corinthians 11 allows for that). Paul is not contradicting himself only a few chapters removed from his previous statement in support of women praying

and prophesying. Further, as Pentecostals we cannot support a woman being used of the Spirit in tongues, interpretation of tongues, or prophecy in public worship and then deny a woman being used of the Spirit to weigh the inspired speech of others.

3. In looking elsewhere in these verses for an explanation that makes sense of both 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14, it seems that various forms of speech had created disruption in the worship services at Corinth. We must understand that these gatherings were not in large arenas or even halls that could seat a few hundred people. First-century worship took place mainly in houses where anywhere from 10 to 75 people might gather. The context of chapter 14 describes a worship service that was out of order—and hence, Paul's admonition that God is a God of peace [εἰρήνης | *eirēnēs*], not disorder [ἀκαταστασίας | *akatastasias*] (1 Cor. 14:33a). Tongues were flying everywhere—both heavenly and (apparently) earthly. If prophets rose to speak, they were interrupted by others rising to speak their most recent revelation. Gifts of the Spirit were operating with full force in Corinthian worship, but the fruit of the Spirit (especially love) was absent. Moreover, believers could not make much sense of what was happening and unbelievers walked away saying, "They're all mad!" (1 Cor. 14:23 NASB).

<sup>39</sup> Ben Witherington III, "Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren't Biblical," *Patheos*: Blog, [https://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2015/06/02/why-arguments-against-women-in-ministry-arent-biblical/?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=share\\_bar#bxeZrWkRiK6ySj7Y.01](https://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2015/06/02/why-arguments-against-women-in-ministry-arent-biblical/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=share_bar#bxeZrWkRiK6ySj7Y.01) (02 June 2015). Retrieved 27 February 2019.



4. Therefore, for the cause of Christ and his body of believers, Paul harnesses the chaos with orderly rules—one of which relates precisely to the cause of chaos, namely, disruptive speech. How do we know this is the case? Verse 35 explains that women should be silent and “inquire about something” from their husbands at home. The imperative verb here for “let them inquire” [ἐπερωτάτωσαν | *eperōtatōsan*] is used in Mark 14:60-61 of the high priest “interrogating” Jesus. It can even mean, “to accost one with an inquiry.”<sup>40</sup> Within the church at Corinth it seems likely that there were multiple people (men and women) speaking out ecstatically and somewhat randomly. While tongues, interpretation, and prophecy were going on in a rather confusing manner, there were also women (in particular) who were probing their husbands for answers to questions that arose from what was being said. The din of voices must have been so cacophonous that Paul attempted to rope the entire process into a corral of order. Women in such a specific setting are to be silent—to stop speaking [σιγαύωσαν | *sigatōsan*]. It is the disruptive speech that is being clamped down by Paul, not ecstatic speech or prophecy or even judgment on the prophecy. He has already described that tongues/interpretation should occur in an orderly fashion with two

or “at the most three” speaking “one at a time” (1 Cor. 14:27). In addition, “two or three prophets should speak” in a similar orderly manner with the “rest” weighing what was said (1 Cor. 14:29). Finally, if a spontaneous revelation “comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged” (1 Cor. 14:30-31). There must be *control* of the spiritual impulses, because the “spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets” (1 Cor. 14:32). All of this is because God is a God of peace, not disorder or confusion. Paul seems to be crafting a manual for spiritual speech in the congregation that is specifically addressed to the situation in Corinth. It is here that the problem created by women in the worship service is discussed. He addresses the particular disturbance in Corinth and the contribution that women were making to it. For the sake of the gospel, it must cease. For the sake of the common edification of the body, it must cease.

5. Why is this admonition for silence addressed to women and not men? Apparently, it was the women who were asking questions as to what speakers were saying in the church. Why were the men not accused of the same thing? To be sure, there is nothing wrong with asking questions

<sup>40</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1159-60. In Mark 14:60, the high priest “questioned” [ἐπηρώτησεν | *epērōtēsen*] Jesus, (NASB) but he remained silent. In 14:61, again the high priest “questioned” (NASB) [ἐπηρώτα | *epērōta*] Jesus. The first instance of the verb is an aorist active indicative, pointing either to a completed action or observing the action as a whole; the second instance is an imperfect active indicative, noting the process of continually asking in the past. This latter one could be translated, “the high priest kept on questioning him...”



*per se*. Paul was addressing the *timing* of these questions, which arose in the midst of confusing worship. As someone trained under a Jewish rabbi, Paul understood the role that good questioning plays in learning.<sup>41</sup> However, as a good Jewish leader, Paul also understood the prejudice against women of his day studying the Torah—something that was usually forbidden in first-century Judaism. One can rather easily surmise a situation in which some of the men in the worship setting were better trained in the language and concepts of the Hebrew Scriptures—especially those who were Jews that had converted to Christianity. Yet we can also surmise that not everyone in the congregation was a converted Jew—some were Gentiles who had converted to Christianity. Whether Jew or Gentile, the women in the Corinthian church were more likely not to know what was going on through prophecy or tongues and needed explanations from their husbands. This is clearly implied in the text itself (1 Cor. 14:35). As Craig Keener states, “we have good reason to believe that women were usually considerably less trained in the Scriptures than their husbands, and hence

more prone to err or ask irrelevant questions.”<sup>42</sup>

Another possible scenario that may clarify the Corinthian situation is that the church was largely a Gentile one. Ben Witherington suggests that some of the Gentile’s previous understanding about how to approach prophets may have been at play here. For example, the oracle at Delphi (which is near Corinth) was a “consultative prophetic,”<sup>43</sup> which means people would ask her questions directly and she would provide an answer. “Thus it was natural for some Corinthians to think that when prophets spoke in their assemblies, they had a right to ask them questions.”<sup>44</sup> What may have been the new believers’ recent pagan context for understanding prophecy could have influenced them so that they were pestering the prophets with questions. Paul instructs these wives that the place to interrogate further on these questions is with their husbands at home. Silence is demanded instead of interrogation because in this way, wives will be in submission to God’s message through the prophets.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, it is crucially important to note that Paul does not deny

41 Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 82.

42 Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 84.

43 Witherington, “Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical.”

44 Witherington, “Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical.”

45 It is important to note that nothing is said in this text about submitting to men or husbands. They are to be “in submission” even as the law says. But in submission to whom? The law, which Paul points to, does not have one passage like this command (namely, to be silent and submit to men). To what, then, is Paul referring? Could it be cultural custom—it’s simply not to be done this way, even among the Gentiles? Yet we know women were prophetesses in the pagan culture, so to what law is Paul referring? We simply do not know. Witherington may have a point when he says this: “What Paul is talking about is being silent in the presence of God and listening to his inspired words, in this case coming from the prophets and prophetesses!” See Witherington, “Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical.”



women or wives the information needed to grow as a Christian. She can learn at home from her husband. In the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD, this was an extremely progressive idea—that women could and should learn from their husbands.<sup>46</sup> Paul’s admonition for silence among the women in Corinth was not offered to stifle their opinions or views, but rather to limit their questioning speech in public worship so that the body may be edified. **The needs of the whole community override the concerns of part of the community—that is the universal principle here,** not that all women everywhere for all time should be silent in worship. In this crucial text, it is necessary to see that a hermeneutic of “just reading the plain sense of the words” will not procure a clear understanding of what Paul is talking about. It is important that order be maintained in worship, so wives may learn from their husbands in the privacy of their own homes rather than interrogating their husbands (or the prophets) in the public arena of an already confused worship setting.

6. A difficulty remains in this passage for the contemporary church to consider. To what extent are Paul’s words to the Corinthian congregation meant to be understood as a specific appeal to a particular situation as opposed to a universal command for women to

be silent in worship? It appears that a careful reading of the context clarifies that this is a *specific* command to a *specific* problem in Corinth. However, as in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul also appeals to the “law” (14:34) and the common custom of the churches (14:35). Do these two appeals to the law and church custom amount to a universal command for the silence of women? Or do these appeals simply underscore Paul’s point regarding the remedy to the specific problem of wives speaking out of turn and adding to the chaos? At this point, frankly, the text does not help us as much as we would like. Such difficulties require an entire framework from which to interpret these types of passages (in other words, a hermeneutic).

How can the church move forward in understanding whether a position described in Paul’s writing is meant universally or only specifically for a given situation in Corinth? First, it will be important to develop together a Pentecostal hermeneutic through which we might read and discuss these difficult passages. The Doctrine & Polity Committee is currently utilizing various Pentecostal scholars’ writings on hermeneutics in order to compose some helpful guidelines for a Pentecostal way of interpreting the text of Scripture. Second, the church might consider how Christians (especially in North America) came to view slavery as something that is inappropriate for Christians. Since

46 Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 84.



the New Testament seems neither to condone or condemn the practice of slavery, how did Christians come to understand it as a sinful practice? Most Christian churches today view slavery as inhumane and unjust in its treatment of other human beings made in the image of God. Yet there are clear instructions from Paul to slaves and masters in the so-called “household codes” of Colossians and Ephesians that seem to point to keeping the status quo of slavery in the first century. For centuries, this was used by some Christians to participate in holding slaves, or even buying and selling them. It is clear from sermons and records from the 1800s in the United States that numerous preachers were supportive of slavery because the “plain sense” of the Scripture pointed to its existence (and implicitly, then, to some kind of support for it). Yet this plain sense reading missed the nuances of Paul’s comments to churches in a society where Christianity was a minority religion and slavery was the status quo of the Roman Empire. It also missed the clear call from Jesus to treat others as we would like to be treated.

Two passages may assist us in viewing slavery as something Paul (in this case) allowed as a part of the fabric of pagan society, but also as something not reflective of the values of the kingdom of God (and therefore something to be changed). First, Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ there is no nationalism or rac-

ism (“neither Jew nor Greek”), no slave domination (“neither slave nor free”) no genderism (“neither male nor female”), “for you all are one in Christ” (ESV). While some people view this only as a snapshot of the future eschaton awaiting us in heaven, it seems that Paul intended for there to be some glimpse of such a slave-free, gender-free, race-free society in the church here and now. The second passage in Philemon 16 helps us see Paul’s intent on slavery even more closely. Paul speaks directly to his brother in Christ, Philemon, to forgive the runaway slave, Onesimus. In so doing, he might him back forever, “no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother” (ESV). Essentially, Paul is hinting for Philemon to free Onesimus and take him in as a brother, not a slave. It may be instructive, then, to examine the changes of our attitudes toward slavery as helpful in reviewing our hermeneutical approaches to the situation with women and leadership as found in these particular texts of Scripture. It is here where our prayerful, communal study of the texts of Scripture as well as the enlightening insight from the Holy Spirit are needed most desperately to be able to decipher how to take these texts as the Word of God to the churches. ■

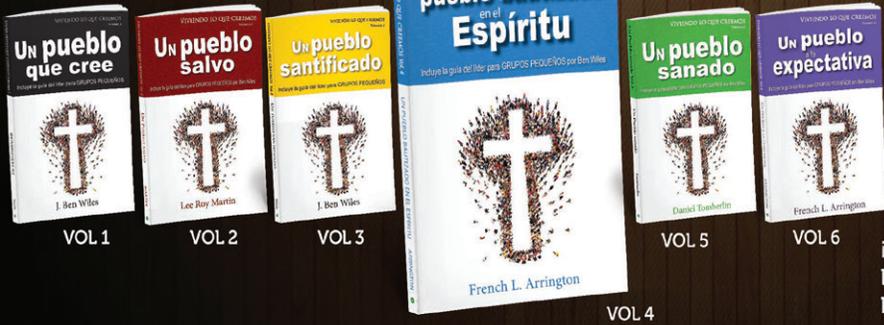
*Dr. Terry Cross is a member of the Church of God Doctrine and Polity Committee and professor in the School of Religion at Lee University.*

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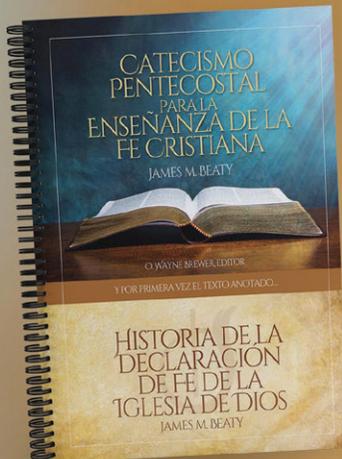


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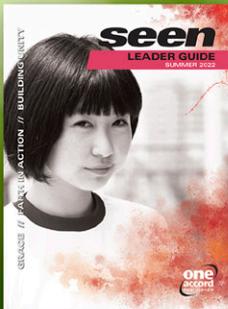
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## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

TIM HILL, GENERAL OVERSEER

# Why I Enjoy Sunday Church Visits

**F**or about half of my Sunday appointments since the beginning of 2021, I have been blessed to be with churches of less than eighty in attendance. Several of the churches were actually attended by less than fifty. I have thoroughly enjoyed being with all of them. Most importantly, I have made many new friends and have heard some amazing life stories from these pastors and their families along the way.

Recently, I was with a pastor that worked at Ground Zero as part of an emergency recovery team, arriving only 3 days after New York City's Twin Towers were tragically attacked on 9/11. His wife was a part of the team also, working alongside him, rescuing, caring for, and providing food, as well as ministry, to first responders. On the day that so many remember during that tragic time, they were within a few feet of then-President George W. Bush. In past years, this pastor served numerous dignitaries and celebrities as a security guard. In addition, the pastor's wife served as a key administrator and employee at the Austria Zoo, as well as the famous San Diego Zoo. But over the last few years, God has been using this couple to help reinvigorate a church that is over eighty years old. The church is seeing great growth as they provide a thriving benevolence outreach ministry to their

community and preach the love of Jesus to hurting people in their small town.

I was recently at another church in which the Lord has raised up more than 20 pastors, missionaries, music ministers, and pastor's companions. The morning I visited, there were probably 35 people in attendance. However, every one of them were people of heritage, dedication, and love for the harvest - and people that loved the Church of God. Every week they sing songs from the red-back Hymnal and teach out of the Evangelical Sunday School Commentary, all provided by Church of God Publications.

Just in the last few weeks I spent a Sunday with a pastor and his precious family that left me feeling I had made a lifelong brother and friend. First of all, we had a great service. The church reminded me of my old home church near Ft. Worth, when Dad would take prayer requests and make the weekly announcements.

At this church, it was the announcements that got my attention. Remember, this was another church of less than 80 folks. Every announcement had to do with something the church was doing in the community to reach other people besides those who regularly attend their services. Youth, children, schools, nursing homes, and more—and I emphasize “more.” Their community outreach was impressive.



The church facilities, as all the others I've been to recently, were immaculate. The building is almost 70 years old, but it looks brand new. Every building on the campus had a similarly attractive appearance.

I had also heard about the church's rich history and recalled the names of former pastors—people that I had heard of but had never met. Faithful men and women now in Heaven. But I did get to meet their sons and daughters who remained as church members after their parents had retired from pastoral ministry and had gone on to their heavenly reward. Among them, there was tremendous loyalty and faithfulness to God and the Church of God.

My favorite part of this particular Sunday was the afternoon tour and lunch with the pastor, his family, and about 25 church members. Their stories, testimonies, and even the laughter reminded me of how great the people of the Church of God really are.

The pastor and his wife have married children, with their oldest now 28. However, about five years ago, they adopted a beautiful little girl when she was only one year old. She is a precious young lady, now with the hope of a good life because a ministry couple cared and loved her.

God has blessed this pastor with a landscaping business, and from what I saw, he and his team of employees are amazing at what they do. By his own testimony, he believes that God has blessed him in such a great way so that he is able to give back to the church and to the work of the Lord.

When I left this couple and church, I felt energized. Truthfully, I usually do. When I witness the passion, recognize

the calling, and observe the gifts of men and women across the Church of God, it never ceases to amaze me. Our denomination is truly a tapestry of multi-gifted people with amazing backgrounds and work ethic that God integrates into their current calling. It reminds me of growing up and watching my own father, well before I could fully comprehend all that it really took to have the cares of the church constantly on you shoulders and in your heart. At the same time my father was pastoring a small group of people, he was also delivering mail, driving a school bus, or painting houses to provide for our family.

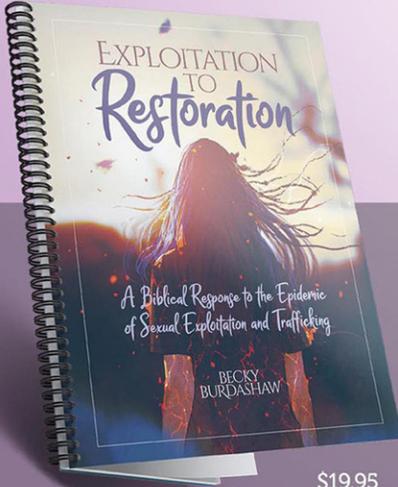
These visits remind me of my first church—and how having 80 people on a good day was special! It reminds me of what it took to make the church work and operate with effectiveness. Admittedly, those 80 people deserved better than what they got from me at that time in my life. Yet, they endured and we didn't kill each other. They taught me, loved me, and to the best of their ability, blessed me at every turn. Just as thousands of similar Church of God churches are doing today, our church made an impact in the community.

## Reflection

As I fly home tonight after another wonderful series of services, I can't help but celebrate these pastors and their incredible congregations. Churches of all sizes and composition have a glorious place to fill in God's Kingdom and in working to Finish the Great Commission.

*Timothy M. Hill*

This and other entries can be found at [letstalkaboutitbytimhill.com](http://letstalkaboutitbytimhill.com).



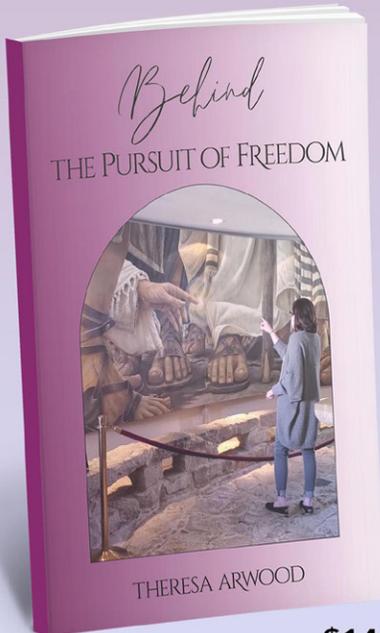
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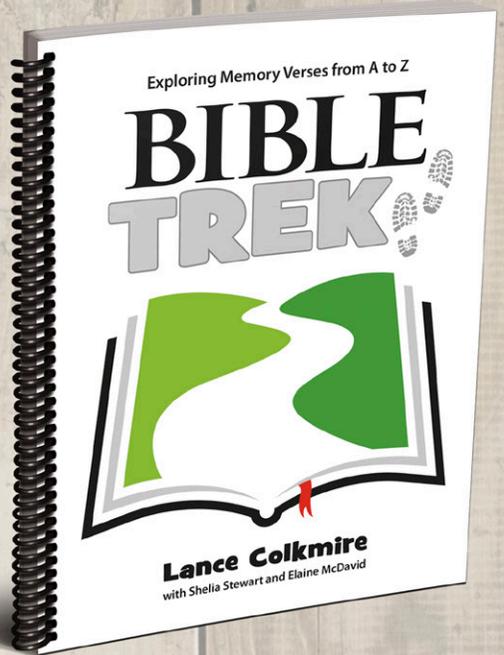




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# Church of God HIGHLIGHTS

*Abbreviated news from faithnews.cc between  
January 1, 2022, and May 1, 2022*

## International Council and Executive Council Complete Sessions

January 26, 2022—Cleveland, TN—The International Council and International Executive Council (IEC) of the Church of God gathered in Cleveland this week for separate and joint sessions.

The International Council meets biennially to discuss and bring forth action items related to international concerns of the church. The group consists of the five members of the Executive Committee, World Missions director and assistant director, field directors and one representative from the five global regions, and representatives from the Hispanic and African American constituency. While normally meeting during the off-year of the International General Assembly, a global surge in the Covid-19 pandemic postponed the gathering from last fall to this week and was conducted in a hybrid format with several members joining through Zoom technology.

The International Council began their meeting with an opening session on Sunday evening where General Overseer Tim Hill delivered an address titled, “Interrupting a Pandemic Paradigm with Prophetic Proclamation, Persuasion, and Performance.” On Monday, the International Council received reports from the various field directors, as well as an address from General Director of World Missions Dr. David Griffis. There was



*Members of the International Council and International Executive Council gather for a joint meeting in January 2022*

a session where various motions were brought forth for consideration by the IEC prior to a joint session which was held on Tuesday morning.

The International Council met with the IEC as they came together for their regularly scheduled January meeting, also conducted in a hybrid format. On Tuesday afternoon and into Wednesday, the IEC deliberated potential items, including motions and resolutions, brought to them by the General Council Agenda Committee (GCAC).

A final slate of agenda items will be presented to the IEC at their April session, after which the official agenda will be released to the General Council for review prior to the International General Assembly, set for July 25–29, 2022, in San Antonio, Texas.



## General Overseer Issues Prayer Alert for Ukraine

February 25, 2022—Cleveland, TN—With the military invasion by Russian troops into the Ukraine, Dr. Timothy M. Hill, General Overseer of the Church of God, issued the following call to prayer to our church family for those in harm's way:

“Our hearts are heavy as we watch and listen to the reports about the invasion that is occurring now in the Ukraine. Our friends and fellow believers in that part of the world are literally seeing their freedom, their livelihood, and their future destroyed. We pray that God will build a hedge of protection around them and provide peace in the midst of this chaos.

Of course, the invasion has also brought turmoil and uncertainty to the world's financial markets, causing further concerns about the global oil supply.

After facing almost two years of a worldwide pandemic, and now with this invasion, it seems that the Enemy of our soul is seeking every way possible to destroy this world that we call home. However, this world is not our home and we long for the heavenly home that is being prepared for us.

Until we make heaven our home, we live together as brothers and sisters in Christ, sharing each other's burdens and trials. So, I call on our Church of God family around the world to pray for peace and safety for those in the Ukraine. May God bring peace to our troubled world.”

## Thousands View Global Ministers Meeting

March 9, 2022—Cleveland, TN—General Overseer Tim Hill and the Church of God Executive Committee led a special online “Global Ministers Meeting” on Tuesday, March 8, with thousands of ministers from across the country and around the globe logging on for the time of inspiration and update.

Under the theme, “Leading Through,” Hill opened the session with a greeting, followed by the same from Executive Committee members Raymond Culpepper, J. David Stephens, David Ramírez, and John Childers. Director of World Missions David Griffis then gave a report on the Church of God as it relates to the conflict in Ukraine.

“Women and children are amassing at the borders as nearly 4 million refugees are expected to flee to neighboring countries from Ukraine,” Griffis said. “In Poland, where the Church of God has 80 churches, more than 850,000 refugees have entered, with 500,000 absorbed into homes.”

Griffis reported that there are three Ukrainian orphanages, with one in Mariupol that had to be evacuated. Also, there are more than 1,000 Church of God congregations throughout Eastern Europe.

Presentations to follow were designed to guide pastors and those in ministry to navigate present conditions as they relate to Covid-19 and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Art Rhodes reported primarily on the economic impact, while Fred Garmon offered guidelines for leadership in these current times.



Hill then introduced pastor and author Larry Stockstill who brought a message of inspiration and instruction. Stockstill, former pastor of Bethany Church, is well-known for his ministry with cell groups and church planting. Under his leadership, more than 26,000 churches have been planted worldwide.

“I have observed how well the Church of God has led during this time,” Stockstill commented referring to the last two years of Covid restrictions and its effect on churches and pastors. “We have precious little time to finish the Great Commission. Leading through is a matter of honoring God’s voice. Church of God pastors, you are in a good family and you (as a denomination), are not going to diminish but multiply and gain.” Hill followed up Stockstill’s presentation with a Church of God statistical report that 35,000 more souls were saved in 2020 than in 2019.

The Global Ministers Meeting concluded with a report from Secretary General John Childers on preparations for the upcoming International General Assembly July 25-29 in San Antonio. Registration, hotel accommodations, and other information is available at [ga22.org](http://ga22.org).

## **Cultural Challenges Facing Our Nation**

April 4, 2022—Cleveland, TN—In response to White House announcements on April 1 in recognition of “Transgender Day of Visibility,” Dr. Timothy M. Hill, General Overseer of the Church of God, issued the following comments on Friday, April 2:

“While our Church of God family abhors discrimination, harassment, and inequality toward anyone created by God and in His image, we feel the same disgust when our government promotes lifestyles and personal selections that are contrary to biblical guidance and directions. Genesis 1:27 (NKJV) clearly states: “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

The actions announced by the White House yesterday allows persons to select an “X” as their gender marker on their State Department issued passports and on their Social Security records. It also requires schools to affirm the self-selected gender identity of students and prohibits state laws that would state otherwise. Along with many other steps, the President further announced that his administration would fight state laws that limit how transgender athletes may compete.

In a technologically and media advanced world, the church is facing situations that we never could have imagined. However, when our government unequivocally supports such sinful behavior, it is even more troubling.

Without question, the church must stand in the gap and call sinful behavior what it is. However, we must also show compassion and mercy toward those who are struggling with that sinful behavior. God did not call the church to condemn the sinner but to teach them, without compromise, to observe the things that God commanded us to do. The Great Commission is clear.



I call on our Church of God family to take a stand today against these cultural challenges while maintaining a heart to see a lost and dying world won to Christ.”

## Fire Destroys South Georgia Tabernacle

April 22, 2022—Tifton, Ga.—A fire of undetermined origin erupted on Thursday afternoon, April 21, destroying the tabernacle worship center on the Church of God campground in Tifton, Georgia.

Images on multiple news and social media outlets showed a fully-engulfed structure with flames shooting out of the front and back of the facility. The building was unoccupied at the time and no one was injured. Photos after the fire was extinguished show the building as a complete loss.

By late afternoon news of the devastating fire had spread across social media with hundreds expressing their sorrow at the loss of a place that holds cherished memories for thousands of people who have experienced camp meetings, youth camps, and other events in and around the nearly 50-year-old structure.

Church of God General Overseer Tim Hill said, “While we are very thankful that no one was injured, we are heartbroken that a sacred space has been damaged by fire. Our prayers go out to Administrative Bishop Gary Lewis and the leadership in South Georgia as they deal with this devastating loss.”

The tabernacle was to be the site of “Junior Talent” this coming weekend with competition in several categories.



*The South Georgia tabernacle was completely destroyed by a fire on April 21, 2022*

An adjacent building displayed a registration banner in anticipation of the hundreds of young people expected for the event, which has now been postponed to May 13-14 at the Azalea City Church of God in Valdosta, Ga.

This is the second major fire that has affected the Church of God in South Georgia this year. On February 2, the Douglas Christian Fellowship church in Douglas, Ga. was also destroyed by fire. ■

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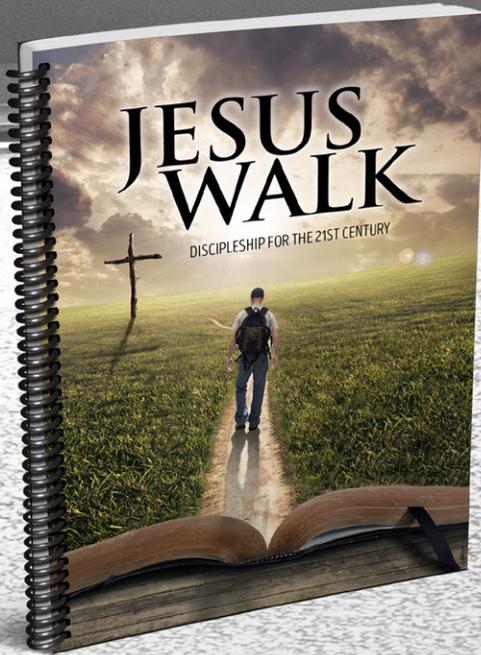
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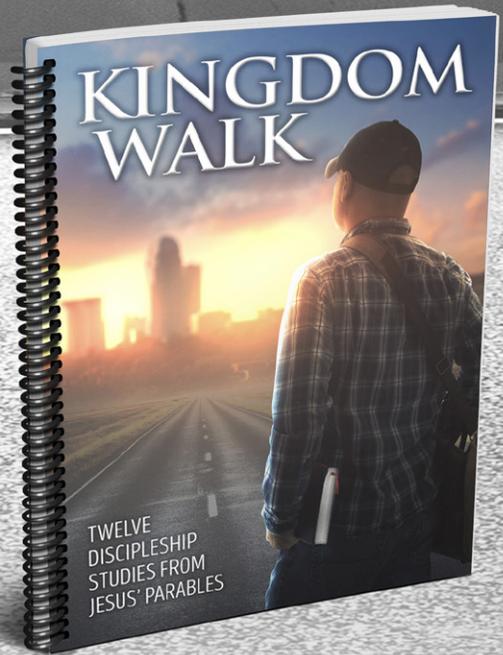
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