

ISSUE

21.49

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

December 8,  
2019

## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Pat Ledbetter  
Brady McAlister  
Jeff Nunn

## Deacons:

Steve Dixon  
Ryan Ferguson  
Ben Hight  
Blake McAlister  
Walker McAnear  
Sam Nunn  
Lance Purcell  
Justin Smiley  
Kevin Wise  
Trevor Yontz

## Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



## A Few Questions We Didn't Get To

By Kyle Pope

Last month I had the honor of engaging in a public discussion with brother Doug Burleson, associate professor at Freed-Hardeman University in Dickson, Tennessee on the issue of expediency as it re-lates to matters that have divided brethren for the last 60-70 years.<sup>1</sup> Doug and I had a profitable discussion, but unfortunately time ex-pired before we had even scratched the surface of the questions we had both prepared to address. Lord willing, we hope to put the tran-script of that discussion, along with the written articles that preceded it, and postscripts written by each of us (including any points we felt were not addressed) into a book for any who wish to study these things more fully. In the interim, I wanted to share a few questions that we were not able to address that we had prepared. Below are some questions Doug posed to me in writing, and the answers I had prepared.

---

**Doug:** What role should historical, literary, and theological context play in the interpretation of Scripture? Does the model of command, example, and necessary inference work the in biblical poetry, narrative, or apocalypse as it does in epistolary literature? Did interpreters in Second-Temple Judaism read Scripture in this fashion? Is silence always prohibitive in biblical interpretation?

**My Answer:** Context always plays a role, however we must recognize the fact that what is presented as historical, literary, or theological conclusions about context are always subject to the bias and understanding of those framing the historical, literary, or theological context. That's why it's so important to let Scripture act as its own commentary upon the context of its teaching.

Does the model of looking to commands, examples, and necessary inferences to establish authority work in all literature? Let's frame this question a different way. Can all written literature be understood on the basis of what it says,

describes, or infers? Yes. Does all biblical literature present the same type of instructive material regarding collective church action? No.

So, did Jews and Christians look at Scripture this way? From Scripture we see appeals to biblical silence as prohibitive. The Hebrew writer does this in reference to priesthood and the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). Paul draws an inference from the singular reference to **"Seed"** rather than "seeds" to argue that the promise to Abraham pointed to Christ (Gal. 3:16). Paul taught the Philippians to follow approved apostolic examples (Phil. 4:9). Jesus taught that obedience to His commands demonstrates our love to Him (John 14:15). So, yes, Jews and Christians in the First Century read Scripture in this way.

The question of biblical silence hinges more on what is said than what is not said. When a method for fulfilling a command is specified by an approved example, the one who follows that example acts within scriptural authority. Silence authorizes nothing. As you pointed out God has not spoken on many things **"the secret things belong to God"** (Deut. 29:29). Our task is to act within what God has revealed. We must not presume to go beyond what the text records.

**Doug:** Do you believe what many social-scientists affirm with regard to people now are more individually minded than those in the context of the first-century Mediterranean world?

**My answer:** Thank you for sharing with me an example of what you are addressing with this question. I was not very familiar with this research. From what I can see from your example and similar things I have seen, I would agree that in some ways the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world may have had a stronger sense of group identity than modern



Americans, but we should be cautious how far we take that. Some types of individualism would have been stronger in pre-Industrial cultures than our own. I don't have to get my own water. I don't have to grow or butcher my own food. I don't have to make my own tools, clothes, and furniture. Many within these cultures had to do all these things for themselves. Most of the focus on post-Enlightenment individualism concerns political identity. That is not what we are addressing. If we take this too far we almost adopt an "it takes a village" mentality, which the Bible does not teach for the home, or the role of the church or civil government.

**Doug:** In your first article you claimed that Ephesians 4:28 was directed to individuals not the church—how do you know this? Was the point in Jesus's parable that "Good Samaritans" should act individually rather than corporately as you suggested in your first article (cf. Luke 10:30-37)?

**My answer:** The text of Ephesians 4:28 reads, "**Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.**" After verse 16 Paul shifts from talking about the "**body**" (singularly) to the actions, background, and behavior of its "**parts.**" If the pronoun "**him,**" in 4:28 applied to the church collectively, we would have to understand Paul to say that the church used to steal. Although that could be true of some of its "**parts**" it could not be said of the church collectively.

The overall point of the parable of the Good Samaritan is what it means to be and act as a neighbor (Luke 10:29, 26). My point was that in the parable Jesus does not illustrate this point by describing collective action or work

done through an institution. So, to appeal to this for authority for either is to assume more than is said in the text.

**Doug:** How is the work of the church related to God's care for all people, particularly as demonstrated in the ministry of Christ?

**My answer:** Paul told Titus, "**the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men**" (Titus 2:11). This is described as the "**the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man**" (Titus 3:4). The church is the "**pillar and ground of the truth**" (1Tim. 3:15). The work of the church that most perfectly demonstrates God's care for all people is the work of proclaiming the gospel of God's grace to a lost and dying world. Jesus's ministry was not to feed and clothe the world. He came to "**seek and to save that which was lost**" (Luke 19:10). That is also the church's work.

**Doug:** Did Jesus ever minister to those outside God's covenant people? How does



the individual vs. corporate responsibility fit with the reality that the church (corporate) is connected to the work of the body of Christ (an individual)? Simply put, can the body of Christ serve others as her Head served others (as I asked in my second article)?

**My answer:** Yes, Jesus ministered to those outside of God's covenant people. Under the Old Law God did the same to non-Israelites, even though Israel was to make no covenants with

them (Deut. 7:2). Could God's actions grant authority for Israelite behavior in that case? No, He expected distinct conduct from His people than He practiced Himself.

On this issue of Christ as an individual and the church as a collective, similarity or comparison is not equivalency. Jesus, as an individual followed Mosaic Law. Was that generic authority to follow the Old Law? No. But let's look at this another way. You seem to be arguing that Jesus's ministry in all aspects grants authority for either the church as a group, or through a human institution to accomplish the same type of work. Where did He do that? With the possible exception of the feeding of the multitudes, He acted as an individual. You may not be saying it's wrong to act as an individual, but you seem to be making a false equation between Jesus's acts as an individual and the church's acts as a group. When we don't see this in the actual record of the New Testament church we can't say that.

---

\* This discussion can be viewed online at: <http://olsenpark.com/Video/Burleson-Pope-Discussion.mp4>.



Faithful Sayings Issue 21.49 December 8, 2019

4700 Andrews Ave.  
Amarillo TX 79106  
806-352-2809  
[www.olsenpark.com](http://www.olsenpark.com)

# *Welcome Visitors*

**We are so glad that you joined us today.  
Please come again.**

**● Let us know if you have any questions.**