IS THERE A BIBLICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DOCTRINE AND CONVICTIONS?

(Dear Reader, please note in advance that the writer of this article proclaims His whole and total allegiance to the Word of God and the Word of God only. The writer gives NO greater value or importance to any person or teaching from the past or present OVER the Bible and its specific teachings.)

The title of this article asks a very crucial question: *Does the Bible make a clear and specific distinction between doctrine and convictions?* Moreover, if it does and there is a distinction, then how important is it that the Church understands the difference?

Having been raised in the UPCI, I am aware that we as a movement have traditionally equated doctrines and convictions as a matter of custom and culture. But, is it possible that the Bible does not equate the two? Could it be that in overlooking the possibility of such Biblical distinctions, we have unintentionally created a climate which precipitates contention between very sincere brethren? In the atmosphere of misconception over these two very important elements of our faith, neither side finds a way to accept and love the other because the misunderstanding produces a rigid reaction: "I am right; they are wrong!"

While this debilitating undercurrent of contention persists, the question remains: *From a Biblical perspective, is there a difference between doctrines and convictions?* To reach a valid Scriptural answer, this article addresses this very crucial, yet extremely sensitive issue.

We as a Pentecostal people have built our lives (spiritually and naturally) upon certain things which we have assumed to be fact. Yet, to my personal knowledge, most of us have never objectively looked at the validity of those "facts" for ourselves. Typically, when someone questions any of our "facts," our first reaction is neither spiritual nor intellectual; instead, it is emotional. This is a very normal human reaction. Unfortunately, some never progress beyond the emotional reaction to where they objectively ask themselves these most important questions: "Do I honestly know my position to be Biblically correct and conclusive?" And, "Can I prove my position with Scripture first to myself, and then to someone else?"

THE GENERAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DOCTRINES AND CONVICTIONS ARE:

A *doctrine* is a principle, pattern, or practice that God Himself clearly established in Scripture by two or three witnesses.
A *conviction* is an application of a doctrine by the Holy Ghost in my personal life to guard or protect MY relationship with God and thus MY salvation.

A doctrine is what I believe and teach that the specifically Bible states concerning salvation, holiness, discipleship, church government, etc.
Convictions define my personal commitments regarding how I live my walk with God as initiated in me by the Holy Ghost.

Doctrines are eternal and unchangeable.
Convictions are personal and vary from individual to individual.

Doctrines define sin that is applicable to all.
Convictions define things which are wrong for me (even though others may be able to do them without jeopardizing their salvation at all).

Doctrines are to be proclaimed publicly.
Convictions are to be kept personal and private to neither cause contention within the body nor influence someone who might be weakened by feeling justified to follow my conviction instead of their own.

Everyone must believe and obey doctrine.
Though some convictions are commonly held, there should be personal convictions that are unique to each of us individually. Even though a conviction is held in common with the rest of the body, THAT does NOT make it a doctrine.

Violating a doctrine is a sin against God.
Failing to keep a personal conviction is a violation of my own conscience and is NOT an offense against anyone else. However, continually violating my convictions will eventually lead to a serious breach in my relationship with Jesus, even to the point of jeopardizing my salvation.

A doctrine is a divine imperative that I am willing to preach as a prerequisite for salvation, maintaining that people will go to hell for not believing and obeying it.
A conviction is something that the Holy Ghost has instructed me personally to practice or to avoid doing because behaving otherwise would jeopardize MY personal salvation.

A doctrine is unchangeable and eternal regardless of time, location, culture, advances in technology, or changes to this world's lifestyles, fads, fashions, politics, etc.
A conviction is something I will or will not do regardless of how anyone else applies it. MY conviction may be different from others — even relatives, close friends, and brothers; but, it is what the Holy Ghost has told me to do or not do. I cannot change a personal conviction because of any changes that others are making. If I do, then I am saying to myself that it was not a personal conviction from the Holy Ghost, but rather an effort on my part to earn my salvation; OR, that I was following/keeping the practice to fit in and avoid being judged by the self-appointed judges of all men's spirituality.

Doctrines should be "contend[ed] for" so that they are never changed.
Convictions should be kept private so that they do not become a source of contention. In fact, Biblically it is wrong to dispute with others over differences in convictions.

Doctrines are a heaven and hell issue for everyone because they are eternal truth.
Convictions are potentially a heaven or hell issue, but only to the individual holding that conviction!

One's convictions MAY BE "stronger" or "stricter" than the doctrinal principle that Biblically guides/directs them in a specific area of their lives and walk with God; but, NO VALID conviction will ever be more "permissive" than the corresponding doctrinal principle. No conviction from the Holy Ghost will ever "endorse" or allow for the disobedience of the Word of God. More plainly stated, the Holy Ghost will NEVER tell anyone that it is OK to disobey the clear teaching of the Bible.

DOCTRINE AND CONVICTIONS — WHAT THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY ARE NOT?

While we are all positive that we know what *doctrine* is, please allow me for the sake of this article to define it Biblically: A *doctrine* is a teaching based upon Scriptures that specifically state and support the teaching. The Oneness of God is a doctrine. The Principle of Holiness is a doctrine. The necessity of being born again by water and Spirit is a doctrine. To be a doctrine, the teaching must be established upon two or three Biblical witnesses which clearly teach/establish the doctrine.

"Doctrine" is synonymous to "Truth." Violating truth is sin. Everything in the Bible is true, but NOT everything in the Bible is an eternal truth. David's adultery with Bathsheba was a true event, but it is not "truth" and therefore cannot be "doctrine." The "truth" of David's adultery may confirm or be "profitable" for (Greek = "toward") a doctrine as taught in 2 Timothy 3:16, but it is not a "Doctrine."

Doctrine represents the will and integrity of God revealed to man. It is God's eternally binding truth taught/communicated to guide, protect, and save mankind. It is the tangible expression of God's directives and expectations compacted, defined, and catalogued for human instruction. Doctrine is that which God holds all of mankind accountable for believing and obeying. Therefore, forsaking (violating) Biblical doctrine is SIN because it represents something that directly opposes what God considers to be right and acceptable. God Himself chose to pass on His doctrines and their ramifications through the conduit of human agency as sanctified, God-called individuals communicate His Word to us through the unction of His Spirit. It is absolutely necessary then for all of us to have a "preacher/teacher" in our lives to communicate God's eternal truths to us so that we can be saved.

The man of God is given the privilege and the responsibility to manifest the "Word of God" through ministry.

> Titus 1:3 But hath in due times ***manifested*** **his word through preaching**, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour;

The commandments of God were written down in words, but doctrine is the "manifesting" of the Word as it is being declared and explained. *Manifested* in Titus 1:3 is translated from the same Greek word used in 1 Timothy 3:16 — "God was *manifest* in the flesh." When the Word was manifest (made visibly evident) in the flesh, it was only on the earth in that form for approximately 33 years. But the Word is "manifested" in our world EVERY TIME a true Man of God ministers it. By manifesting (preaching/teaching) the Word of God (truth, i.e., doctrine that is eternal and unchangeable), it is applied to all mankind: in every place, in all cultures, and in all ages.

When considering doctrine, it is absolutely imperative that we remember that God is a God of principles and patterns. The Lord does not communicate to us the specifics of everything He thinks and stands for.

> John 21:25 And **there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.** Amen.

Neither did the Lord use scripture to outline the specifics of how those principles and patterns are to be applied with respect to any particular era, civilization, or generational life characteristic. To do so would have made the Bible obsolete and extremely cumbersome in a relatively short amount of time.

Because He foreknew that man and society would change with time, God gave us His eternal principles to follow, that by them each generation might rightly govern their lives. By applying His principles and following His patterns in an appropriate contemporary measure and fashion as prompted by the Holy Ghost, we can be sure that we are pleasing Him. This present-tense application of God's principles is called a *conviction*.

BIBLICALLY, CONVICTIONS ARE NOT DOCTRINES!

Again, a *conviction* is an **APPLICATION** of a Biblical principle by the Holy Ghost in an individual's life. It is a specific persuasion for "applying the Word" to a specific area of our personal walk with God — it is "faith" — it is "our faith."

In the *King James Version* of the Bible, the word conviction(s) IS NOT found **anywhere**. In fact only two translations even use the word conviction(s) at all: the *New Living Translation* uses it just once, and the *Amplified Bible* uses it five times. In the verses where the *Amplified Bible* uses the word "conviction(s)" in its "amplified sections," it does so to better explain the word *faith* that the *King James Version* uses to translate the Greek word *pistis. Strong's* defines *pistis* as "persuasion or moral conviction, reliance upon Christ."

Thayer's defines *pistis* as, "conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the New Testament, **of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things**, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it."

Vines', in defining faith (*pistis*), states: "The main elements in 'faith' in its relation to the invisible God, as distinct from 'faith' in man, are especially brought out in the use of this noun and the corresponding verb, *pisteuo*; they are (1) a firm conviction , producing a full acknowledgment of God's revelation or truth, e. g., 2 Thess 2:11-12; (2) a personal surrender to Him, John 1:12; (3) **a conduct inspired by such surrender**, 2 Cor 5:7. Prominence is given to one or other of these elements according to the context. **All this stands in contrast to belief in its purely natural exercise, which consists of an opinion held in good 'faith' without necessary reference to its proof.** The object of Abraham's 'faith' was not God's promise (that was the occasion of its exercise); his 'faith' rested on God Himself, Romans 4:17,20-21."

In our hearts, minds, and daily walk with God, convictions must never be permitted to supersede or contradict doctrine. **Furthermore, a conviction must not be made equivalent to doctrine. Such misapplication of any conviction redefines it and, thereby, causes it to fulfill the definition of a *tradition*.** Doing this violates the Scriptural mandate that prohibits anyone from "adding to" the Word of God.

The problem for us as ministerial brethren comes in when each of us distinctly applies the principles either differently or to different degrees of literalness. Convictions or so-called convictions ("opinions" without the weight of supporting Biblical principle) are made invalid, unreliable, and contentious WHEN imposed upon others or used to judge others who do not "preach" them "exactly like I do."

Therefore, doctrine applies to everyone and is binding upon all; however, personal faith or conviction is specific to each of us individually and may vary from individual to individual. This is easily demonstrated by the fact that NO TWO individuals agree on every single point of doctrine and/or the many convictions that are "common" to us. Why would God "allow" this to be the case? Because learning to love one another is MORE important to Him than us being able to dot each other's "i's" and cross each other's "t's."

> John 13:34-35
> 34 A new **commandment** I give unto you, **That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.**
> 35 ***By this*** **shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.**

It would not be hard to love one another IF we thought EXACTLY alike and had everything in common! Without our differences, we would be "spiritual clones" instead of free moral agents who must each answer to God individually for our conduct. Most importantly, our differences allow us to demonstrate/prove that we love one another.

THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD ARE GOD'S APPLICATIONS OF HIS ETERNAL PRINCIPLES THAT WE ARE EXPECTED/REQUIRED TO FOLLOW:

While our God is a God of principles and patterns, He is NOT a God of Commandments. Please, Dear Reader, before you have a heart attack, let me explain. Again (but not for the last time), our God is a God of Principles and Patterns! Commandments are ALWAYS an *application* of an eternal principle (the reason or eternal truth behind the command).

While God is a God of principles with "patterns," He is first and foremost a God of principles. *Patterns* are the examples or object lessons the Lord uses to demonstrate His principles to mankind. First, God has a principle. As such, He demonstrates the principle consistently through His patterns. Because of the frailty of our flesh, in many cases, He then further communicates the principle by applying it in our lives as a "commandment."

Again, commandments ARE NOT the principle. Jesus demonstrated this point when He "expanded" the Old Testament Commandments to be applied in the New Testament. For example, the definition of adultery was expanded from illicit copulation to include looking on a woman to lust after her, and “Thou shalt not kill (murder)” was extended from wrongly taking a human life to “whosoever is angry with his brother without cause.” Based on the eternal principle of God (which remained constant and unchanged), Jesus broadened the application (the commandment) from simply prohibiting the act of adultery or murder to include the thoughts and intents of the heart even though no action was ever taken.

Therefore, God’s commandments are APPLICATIONS of His principles that God Himself has made a part of His Word. Yes, His commandments ARE a part of His Word (and as such are included in “Doctrine”), but they do NOT exclusively define His Word to us. The number of principles that God did NOT link within His Word to a specific and required "application" (Commandment) far exceeds the number that He did.

The point that I have, am, and will be making throughout this document: Only God can specify an application of His own principles and make them a part of His Word, and thus, a part of His doctrine. We cannot make OUR convictions/applications (regarding any unapplied principles contained in God’s Word) into “commandments” and make them equal to His Word. To do so is **SIN** in God’s eyes!

The Lord’s own applications of eternal principles that are included by Him in His written Word ARE eternal doctrines, even His applications of His principles that are not specifically called by Him “commands” or “commandments.” However, the purpose of this article is to "correct" the error of those **who presume to equate** their own applications of eternal principles (even those personal convictions initiated by the Holy Ghost) to the "Word of God."

Doctrines that are God-applied principles are either equal to commandments or are commandments themselves. For example, the Oneness of God doctrine/principle is something to know, not something to be done. Yet, it is called “the Greatest Commandment.” Can a person thus be saved by a God whom they define as three persons in a “mysterious” committee/commune? NO! Therefore, the "doctrine" of the Godhead becomes a "command" even though it is not something to do. Obviously the first three of the “Ten Commandments" confirm this.

So again, there is no need for a specific verse expressing verbatim that violating a Biblical doctrine is sin. The entire Bible both implies and confirms this as demonstrated by the following example verses:

Romans 6:16-18
16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?
17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, **but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.**
18 **Being then made free from sin**, ye became the servants of righteousness.

1 Peter 1:22 **Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit** unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

If it takes "obeying" doctrine/truth to be saved from our sins, then NOT obeying doctrine/truth will certainly cause us to be lost in our sins.

THE *UPCI MANUAL* ON DOCTRINES AND CONVICTIONS.

The UPCI has demonstrated the difference between doctrine and conviction in its approach to almost every element of the doctrine of *Holiness*. For example, to state that it is a sin to have a TV in our homes would be a statement of doctrine. But, to state that, "'because of the evils on television,' we 'strongly discourage' our people from having one" is a statement of conviction (as the *Manual* does in a Biblically correct manner in the "Articles of Faith" under the section entitled "Holiness").

Nowhere in the *UPCI Manual* is it stated that it is a "SIN" to possess a device called a "TV"! If we had officially taken that position, we would be committing the sin of "adding to the Word." Our Elders in writing the "Articles of Faith" were correct in their chosen method of declaring our faith on the subject by using a "conviction approach" rather than a "doctrine approach."

However, the UPCI has also taken the additional position that ministers CANNOT have a TV in their home. Is this a doctrinal position? No! What is it then? Let me explain it this way. In our local church, we do our best to avoid preaching or teaching anything as a "salvation issue" that cannot be proven by Scripture. However, we DO have "leadership, ministry, and platform requirements." We tell our leaders and those who are candidates to be leaders that while we are not implying that all leadership requirements are "salvation issues" (though most of them are), they are nonetheless required disciplines for those who would serve as examples to our flock.

As the Bishop of Antioch, I expect the leaders of our church to abide by these requirements as a demonstration of their commitment and submission. Again, while most of the leadership requirements are the product of Biblically confirmed "doctrine," some are not. Therefore, they are required as "disciplines," not tenets of salvation.

To take a "doctrinal" position that it is sin to have a TV, you would have to say that just having the unplugged and unconnected box/set just sitting there is a sin. That is an extreme position that few have truly wanted to attempt to explain or defend. All things considered, the problem is not the box; rather, the problem is the content of what may be watched on the box. Consequently, the debate among us (for at least 95% of us) is not really about the box, but about the content.

Removing all of the clamorous noise of the debate, the chief concern really boils down to this: How do we guide our people so that they are not vulnerable to the "wiles" of the evil programming on TV? While the concern is certainly valid, addressing it in an un-Scriptural manner helps no one. Therefore, the "official" UPCI position (as found in the *Manual*) on the use of the specific technology called "TV" must be acknowledged for what it is and for how it must be communicated: It is a CONVICTION, not a DOCTRINE!

Unfortunately, some brethren have "interpolated" the UPCI's position about TV to the point of actually taking the religious route by making a rule for their Church: "Thou Shalt Not Have a TV or you are going to hell"! I have deep compassion on these sincere brethren today because they have "boxed" themselves into a corner and are now confounded with having to address the changes in technology based on their rule-making approach. I pray God's blessing on each of them to enable them with the honesty and wisdom for that.

When you take a "rule-making" approach with one type of technology, you must then make specific rules for EACH AND EVERY type of technology in order to be consistent and credible. When you DON'T follow through with your original approach, then you discredit your "rule-making" methodology used in the first instance.

Thus, the great pressure and angst felt by so many honest-hearted brethren today comes from being forced into manufacturing "explanations" for the inconsistency of their "doctrinal" position that forbids the use of TV but allows the "unrestricted" use of other communications technology, especially the internet. These "explanations" do not even sound right to their own ears and conscience. Yet, what other recourse is there for those who will not or cannot bear to change their approach concerning the first technology, no matter how Biblical the new approach may be.

Eventually, the honest-hearted will be compelled to do what all sincere ministers have had to do from time to time: Stand before our people and confess that while we have done our best; upon further study of the Scripture, "this" (whatever "this" may be) is the position we now must take.

NO ONE — NO MINISTER — can expect himself to be correct in his understanding, attitude, approach, spirit, etc. 100% of the time. God will NOT LET us be so flawless. He will periodically orchestrate occasions in our lives that require "reflection and repositioning." (This is a Biblical "God-pattern.") This examining of ourselves for the purpose of spiritual and Scriptural re-adjustment is called "growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). If I am already "perfect," then I do not "need" to grow (change). But, of course, by taking the position that I do not need to grow (change), I am concluding both Peter and Jesus to be liars. "Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). The Lord asked Job if he would "condemn" God in order to justify himself (Job 40:8)? What will be our response to God in this situation?

True Christianity is NOT a religion; it IS a relationship. The goal of true Christianity is an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Doctrine is the pathway to achieving that relationship. Convictions are the personal expression of it. Pseudo-Doctrines (traditions, i.e., rules NOT made by Jesus) are a product of religion and are one of the greatest hindrances to that relationship.

TRUE BIBLICAL DOCTRINES CANNOT BE MADE OBSOLETE BY ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY

(I am a teacher, and the essence of teaching is repetition/redundancy. Therefore, here is some redundancy.)

One more time — many sincere brethren have erroneously (and unbiblically) preached the conviction against having a TV not just as a "local church discipline," but more so as a "salvation doctrine." They now find themselves in the very difficult and unenviable position of having to determine how to continue to preach their "doctrine" in a rapidly changing technological environment.

Ultimately the "problem" is much more fundamental than simply "adjusting" or "editing" our doctrinal "explanations" to encompass the blurred lines between various communication and entertainment technologies that have literally captured our world. The real problem is how some chose to handle the whole issue in their individual local church in the first place.

It is impossible to separate "rule-making" from religion. Once again (but not for the last time in this document), true Christianity is not a religion; it is God's plan for how we can be reconciled to and daily experience an intimate, personal relationship with God.

Any true relationship certainly has its "restrictive" expectations. My wife certainly has such expectations and I wholeheartedly agree with them; and, I have every intention to continue keeping them for the next 45 years as I have for the last 45.

However, she has many other, more important expectations that are not "restrictive" in nature. No matter how faithfully I "keep" the restrictive ones, such careful conduct in no way will satisfy her expectations of love, devotion, being cherished, etc., etc. Just because I do not commit adultery does not mean that I am loving and cherishing her. In point of fact, the more I am focused on and devoted to meeting her POSITIVE expectations, the less I have to focus on NOT VIOLATING the restrictive areas of our commitment.

Why do my wife and I have such expectations of each other? Because we are God's children and because we have become like Him in reflecting His expectations with respect to the relationship He shares with each of us individually and with His body/Bride collectively.

Doctrines are not rules to keep, but the thoughts of a loving God that I am to love more than anyone or anything else (see The Greatest Commandment). I cannot love Him without loving His thoughts/Words! I most certainly do NOT want to love what He hates and hate what He loves!

Conduct and the intents of the heart are not mutually dependent. It is possible for a person to act in ways that are not truly a reflection of what is in his or her heart. One is not always a product of the other. Even Paul (Romans 7) acknowledged that he did not always act according to his heart's desire. Likewise, people whose "devotion" is expressed by "keeping" religious rules in no way "prove" that their hearts are right and in a saved condition. Salvation is NOT a product of how "faithfully" rules are "kept"!

Consequently, we always collide with obstacles when we attempt to "codify" conduct in areas where God reveals and declares only "unapplied" principle. Certainly, God does have specific expectations for the practice of some of His principles. And, because He includes such expectations only rarely in His Word, we should pay special attention to those instances where He applies the principle within the context of His Word. Take note though that God ONLY includes practical applications of His principles as a part of His doctrines in areas where cultural, technological, moral, etc. changes cannot affect anyone's ability to participate in His prescribed practices of His principles.

It only takes a reasonably simple, Biblically apologetic presentation of Scriptural "witnesses" to demonstrate/prove that:

> The principle of our faith in the distinction of the sexes, as the Creator intended, is Biblically prescribed to be visibly applied/revealed by:
>
> > The length of hair on men/women,
> >
> > The choosing to wear clothes that clearly reflect the difference in the sexes, i.e., women not wearing garments that "divide the loins like a man."

In addition, our faith in the precept that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is supposed to shine from our faces (as it did from the Man, Christ Jesus') is Biblically applied by:

Not cloaking our face in anything artificial, false, or concealing for the purpose of hiding our true selves; and therefore, "masking" the glory of God.

The doctrine of modesty (not shamefully exposing our body - the "temple of the Holy Ghost) is Biblically applied to our daily existence by:

The Scriptural definition of what defines "nakedness" in God's eyes, i.e., how much of our bodies should be covered in any kind of public setting and how "revealing" our clothes should be.

These and other Biblically specified applications of His principles are included as a part of His written declarations. Therefore, His applications so contained in His Word are not convictions; they are indeed doctrines.

However, when we decide to equate our opinions of how certain principles should be practiced by making them equal to those specified practices/applications of principles that the Lord authored, we make ourselves equal with God AND cross the line of adding to His Word. We must be very, very careful in this area. In God's eyes, adding to His Word is just as odious as taking away from it.

THE SPIRIT OF THE "LAW"?

When we choose to make "laws" or "rules" to express OUR application of Biblical principles (a "codified conviction"), we cannot then appeal to the violation of the "spirit of the law" as being equivalent to the "breaking" of our rule. Our habit is that we make a rule and then condemn anyone who is literally keeping our rule, but not in the exact way that we "approve of."

If one is going to make a "law," then it must cover all contingencies (A principle covers all contingencies; a law/rule does not). If the law-makers leave "loopholes," then the onus is on the rule-maker, not on the one who finds the loophole. When someone keeps the rule, but in a manner deemed unsatisfactory by the rule-maker; the rule-maker cries "foul," stating piously that the individual utilizing the loophole is violating the "spirit of the law."

In this context, the only valid reference to the "spirit of the law" is the one that refers to the spirit of the one who is making the law! The "law/rule-makers" must ask themselves, "What is our motive in making the law/rule?" If there is a violation of the "spirit" concerning a law, it is the controlling, manipulative, prideful, religious spirit that influences the one who appoints himself "law-maker" in an area where only God Himself can be that one.

Making laws/rules that God chose NOT to make for His people is idolatrous.

> Isaiah 33:22 **For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.**
>
> James 4:11-12
> 11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.
> 12 **There is ONE lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?**

There are many laws and commandments that are a valid and necessary part of the Word of God, and God the "Lawgiver" authored and instituted every one of them. God has the right to make any law He so desires; He also has the right to NOT make a "law" even if we think He "should" have made one. Because He is God and we are not, He chose to make only those laws that He deemed absolutely necessary for mankind. If our Creator did not see the need for a law about something, how is it that we can see the need for one?

Applying a Biblical principle, as directed by the Holy Ghost, that the Lawgiver chose not to specifically apply within the context of His Word is called *following a conviction*. As such, convictions MUST NEVER be equated to the Laws made by the Lawgiver! If He wanted to use a law-based approach to governing any other area of our lives by a specific principle of His Word, HE would have made one. To presume to make one for Him is "adding to the Word."

Keeping the Word of God is a heart *matter*! Breaking the Word of God is a heart *issue*. Laws/Rules CANNOT govern or control what is in a man's heart. The only lasting solution to wrong behavior is to receive the revelation that one's actions are NOT the violations of some rule or law, but a personal offense against the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. As David came to understand, our sins are against God and God alone (Psalms 51:4)!

Thus, repentance is more than just changing our minds about what sin is and is not; it is changing our minds about who God is and who He is to us! When we see the Lord differently, then we will see our actions and attitudes differently. The product of this insight is a change in our conduct, because our love for Him will constantly urge us to conduct ourselves in ways that honor Him and strengthen our relationship with Him.

While sinning is certainly a "salvation issue," living a life above sin is only possible as a direct result of having a genuine, intimate, personal relationship with Him — truly knowing and loving Him! If we want relief from the weariness of independently carrying the burden of overcoming sin, we must become "yoked up" in a shared relationship with Him.

> Matthew 11:28-30
> 28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
> 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
> 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

ONLY BY JOINING (YOKING UP) WITH HIM CAN WE HAVE VICTORY IN OUR LIVES EVERYDAY!

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE CONCERNING THE USE OF ALL TECHNOLOGY?

The doctrinal principle that defines the sinful use of technology is plainly and emphatically declared in the Bible (for additional Scriptures on this subject, see my study — "The Biblical Principle Governing the Eyes" available on myapw.com OR apostoliciron.com):

> Psalms 101:3 **I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes:** I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.
>
> > Psalms 101:3 **(The Amplified Version)**
> > 3 **I will set no base or wicked thing before my eyes. I hate the work of them who turn aside [from the right path]; it shall not grasp hold of me.**

Matthew 5:28-30
28 But I say unto you, **That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.**
29 **And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.**

> Matthew 5:28-29 **(The Amplified Version)**
> 28 But I say to you that everyone who so much as looks at a woman with evil desire for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
> 29 If your right eye serves as a trap to ensnare you or is an occasion for you to stumble and sin, pluck it out and throw it away. It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be cast into hell (Gehenna).

> Matthew 5:28-29 **(Good News Translation)**
> 28 But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart.
> 29 So if your right eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell.

> Matthew 5:28-29 **(Weymouth's Translation)**
> 28 But I tell you that whoever looks at a woman and cherishes lustful thoughts has already in his heart become guilty with regard to her.
> 29 If therefore your eye, even the right eye, is a snare to you, tear it out and away with it; it is better for you that one member should be destroyed rather than that your whole body should be thrown into Gehenna.

Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: **the eye is not satisfied with seeing,** nor the ear filled with hearing.

> Ecclesiastes 1:8 **(New Living Translation)**
> 8 **Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied.** No matter how much we hear, we are not content.

Psalms 119:33-37
33 Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.
34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.
35 Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.
36 Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

37 **Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.**

Psalms 119:37 **(New Living Translation)**
37 **Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word.**

Psalms 119:37 **(The Bible in Basic English)**
37 **Let my eyes be turned away from what is false; give me life in your ways.**

Psalms 119:37 **(New English Translation Bible)**
37 **Turn my eyes away from what is worthless! Revive me with your word!**

Psalms 119:37 **(New International Reader's Version)**
37 **Turn my eyes away from things that are worthless. Keep me alive as you have promised.**

NO RULE made by men could ever be stronger or more convicting than these "witnesses" (and of course, there are many other verses that further confirm this doctrinal principle). Also, there are no "loopholes" to these Scriptures. The Holy Ghost and our conscience govern us on a level and to a degree that NO rule ever could!

Equally as important is the fact that it is impossible for any advancement in technology to render THIS doctrinal principle/position "OBSOLETE"!!! One of the most important questions that can and must be answered by the UPCI today is:

Which is the stronger (and more Biblical) position to take:

Making a religious rule that could (and has) become obsolete,
OR
Strongly declaring a Biblical principle that fits in EVERY area of our lives that involves our eyes?

There is a long-standing, contentious debate over this "no-TV" rule that will perpetually continue as long as we govern the eyes by rule rather than principle. The debate concerns the validity of the rule and/or the question of how does one keep the rule in today's world. But, there is NO argument strong enough to diminish the plain teaching of the eternal, unchanging principle of the Word of God that governs the use of our eyes.

Will some violate the principle? Yes! But man has been doing that for thousands of years and no rule in our *Manual* or "doctrine" taught in our Churches has/is ever going to prevent it. However, for those of us who want to please the Lord by following His Word, the eternal principle leaves no doubt about what pleases God and what does not.

The New Testament gives us specific "guidelines" about how to have a vibrant, satisfying, and holy relationship with our Lord and Savior. These guidelines are easy to remember and effective in assisting us in knowing how to walk in the Spirit and live a life IN the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25).

The following Biblically-based **GUIDELINES** (not rules or laws) (included only as examples) are superior to any rule/law that any man, church, or organization could ever hope to author for "governing" the lives and lifestyle of the "saved":

> Anything that I cannot pray while doing, I should not be doing.
>
> Anything that I cannot bless the Lord while doing, I should not be doing.
>
> Anything that I cannot ask the Lord to bless me doing, I should not be doing.
>
> Anything that I cannot fellowship with the Lord while doing, I should not be doing.
>
> Anything that is not expedient/profitable to the advancement of His Kingdom, I should not be doing.
>
> Anything that does not spiritually edify me and/or the Body of Christ, I should not be doing.
>
> Anything that undermines my sensitivity to His Presence and His Voice, I should not be doing.
>
> Anything that disturbs my peace while I am doing it, I should not be doing.
>
> Love is what you give, not what you get; so, loving God means learning to know Him enough to find out what He likes and dislikes and what He loves and what He hates; all so that we may give ourselves to Him in such a way that our actions, attitudes, and activities please Him.

In some people's opinion, these guidelines/principles are rules. But, again, they are NOT "rules" at all, just guidelines. Furthermore, some would even try to argue that these "rules" eliminate "everything" — "That leaves nothing for us to do," they would say. That is ridiculous! Every "good" and "perfect" gift originates with our Father (James 1:17).

Our Father withholds NO GOOD THING from those who love Him (Psalms 84:11). These principles do not eliminate any natural (non-church) activities that are good, wholesome, honest, pure, etc. They allow for: vacations to most places; many types of physical activities and recreation; even reading, listening to, or watching "non-spiritual" things that do not promote anti-God thoughts and actions; video games that do not contain violence, profanity, and other sinful activities; intimate relations between husband and wife; etc., etc., etc.

In every single situation and circumstance, the Biblical principle will always be more thorough, more comprehensive, more effective, and more convicting in guiding and governing our lives and churches than any rule (conviction made into a "doctrine") we could make that the Lord Himself did not specifically make!

AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO FIGHT FOR RIGHT?

Jude resoundingly implores us to "earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). Yet, Jesus just as clearly called us to depart from the "traditions of the Elders." When men (no matter how sincere and well-intended) codify a conviction (meant for an individual) into a religious rule for all (that is not a doctrine by the Biblical definition of what a doctrine is), we are held responsible for correcting the error.

For example, one could easily and reasonably take the following position:

> Since automobiles have been used to do many illegal and immoral things, we should not have one. How much sin has been committed in the "back seat" of a car? Many people have killed themselves and others because of wrongly using an automobile. In fact, many of us preachers regularly break the speed limit law. Therefore, automobiles are "evil" and a Christian should not have or use one. The amount of good that can be done with an automobile cannot excuse and does not outweigh the evil that can be done in and by using one.

Based on all of the above, some preachers would sense an urgency to preach that owning and/or driving a car is a sin. Right? Obviously by now, 99% of you have already concluded that this whole argument over automobiles is ludicrous. Really? Why? Does it not follow every argument made against having a "TV"!

Some would say that banning the use of cars is not the same thing as denouncing the use of TV: One is essential for living and the other is merely for entertainment. Really? So driving a car is not entertaining? Many of the fatalities caused by autos every year are the result of people driving a car for entertainment purposes.

Some would shout that this whole discussion about banning cars is spurious — “Just implausible silliness,” they would say. Really? It is in fact the exact position that some preachers and churches took in the early 1900's when automobiles were first becoming popular. (Some continue to teach this, consider the “Amish.”)

What if some well-meaning preacher today had a conviction against having a car and started “judging” everyone else who drove one? Would we all stop driving one out of “spiritual self-defense” to avoid being judged and branded? Such is the effect of convictions that have been un-Biblically transformed into “doctrines”!

As a side note here, let it us be reminded that in the 1920's, 30's, and into the 40's (and for some relentless rule-makers, into the 50's), many, many preachers and churches took the same approach concerning radio. It was banned and damned as a technology. So in our “heritage,” we have already had some experience taking a rule-based position on a technology, rather than a principle-based approach to content. And, the same thing that happened the first time around is happening now: changes in technology have made the “rule” obsolete. Apparently, we did not learn anything from the first experience. (Oh, by the way, centuries ago many preachers and churches also took a stand against “books” when they first began to be printed and made available and affordable for the common man. There truly is nothing new under the sun.)

I am not writing to promote TV’s or to advocate having one. My purpose in this discourse is to address the unbiblical approach that many of us ministers have used in communicating our concerns to the sheep that we are charged with shepherding. Convictions made into **pseudo-doctrines** can never effectively help a person get to heaven. In fact, they can possibly help prevent a person from being saved by establishing a FALSE understanding of what the Christian walk is supposed to be. Again, true Christianity is NOT a religion with rules and laws; it is a pathway to an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ! Inasmuch as a true marriage is NOT about keeping rules, neither is true Christianity.

“BELIEVE THE BIBLE AND WHAT IT SAYS.”

When I first came to Maryland to start a church in 1970, I had to find out from God how to reach the many Catholics in our area. “MARY-land” was the only Catholic colony of the original 13. The first capital of “MARY-land” was St. Mary’s City.

Following the Lord’s direction, I strongly and persistently told every Catholic who would let me: “Do not follow anything which any man cannot show you in the Bible. No church can save you! Only God can save you. Only the Bible can tell you how to be saved. Therefore, each of you can only be saved by what God tells you in His Word. Compare everything that you have been taught by the Priests with what the Bible actually says.

Read it for yourself. If you cannot find what man is telling you in the Bible for yourself, then you will be lost for believing and following it."

Many believed me and were saved. However, as I began to teach them how to be "Pentecostal," I repeated the things which I had been told and taught in church and Sunday School. These new converts said to me, "Where are these things in Scripture"? I said to them, "Follow them because I tell you to; I am your pastor." They said to me, "We are coming to this church because you told us to never believe anything that cannot be shown us in the Bible. Now, why should we follow you and do what you are telling us to do, when you told us it was wrong to follow what the leaders of the church we were raised in required when it was not in the Bible. We will believe and do anything you show us in the Scripture that the Bible says. However, we will not blindly follow any leader ever again."

What could I say? I was telling them to do what I was doing. I was blindly following what I had been taught and telling them to blindly follow after me. Therefore, I had to start over from "scratch" and find out for myself what the Bible actually taught about the "required" lifestyle for those who want to go to heaven.

I realized that as a pastor, if I was going to tell someone that they were going to hell for doing or not doing something, **then I must know it and be able to Biblically prove it first to myself, and then with true faith and conviction prove it to them.** The weight of that responsibility MUST NOT be taken lightly. We all as ministers will answer to God for what we've told people that they must do or not do — OR they will go to hell. I am NOT willing to "send" people to hell over ANYTHING that cannot be proven in the Scripture!

Consider this sobering thought: What we are preaching to our people MAY in fact be in the Bible. BUT, if I PERSONALLY don't know where it is and/or how to explain (teach) it, then **FOR ME** (and them) what I am actually preaching is **MY** "Tradition" — not God's Truth. Why? Because my faith is not in what God has shown me in His Word, but rather in what I have been told to believe. **Now, that is doing real damage to God's Word! When we, through our ignorance of His truth, turn genuine truth into tradition by teaching it from another's perspective and not from our own personal knowledge and faith, we have effectively dishonored His Word!** A tradition is a "belief" that is transmitted "verbally" from generation to generation. Truth is that which is taught directly from the Word of God itself, because the teacher has bothered to look!

Many can testify to receiving doctrinal Truth directly from God through His Word by revelation. BUT no one can testify to receiving a tradition by revelation from God — SOME PERSON HAS TO TELL IT TO THEM!

Paul said to the Hebrews:

> Hebrews 5:12-14
> 12 **For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.**
> 13 **For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.**
> 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The Hebrew Christians had a serious problem: THEY WERE NOT GROWING UP! Both natural and spiritual children do what they do because they are TOLD to do it. But natural and spiritual adults are supposed to do *RIGHT* because they *WANT* to do what is right. They do right because they have taken ownership of the truth concerning what is right and wrong. As David said, "Thy word have I hid in MY heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalms 119:11). Likewise, the Hebrew Christian, who did eat "meat" from the Word, used that Word as their "lamp" to guide them as they exercised their senses to discern both good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

However, because the Hebrew Christians were not growing up, they were not fulfilling their spiritual responsibilities. Paul said that they needed to be taught "AGAIN." Why? Because people who are taught and then receive and believe the teaching of Truth become spiritually active adults, fulfilling God's plan and purpose for their lives. They become active participants in His Kingdom!

OUR LORD'S VIEW OF AND POSITION ON "TRADITION" IS VERY STRONG AND VERY PLAIN!

Jesus declared that teaching/keeping "tradition" (convictions and/or opinions that have been equated to the written Word) has the following effect upon a Christian's walk:

1) Following tradition causes me to "transgress" the commandment of God. (Matthew 15:3)
2) Tradition makes the commandment of God of "none effect" for me. (Matthew 15:6, Mark 7:13)
3) Tradition causes me to "lay aside" the commandment of God. (Mark 7:8)
4) Following tradition is a rejection of God's commandment by me. (Mark 7:9)
5) Tradition causes my worship to become vain. (Matthew 15:9, Mark 7:7)

TRADITIONS ARE NOT HARMLESS! NO MATTER WHO STARTED THEM!

There are very few spiritual consequences in the Bible more grim and frightening than the extremely negative impact resulting from trusting “innocent” and “time-honored” (even deeply loved, long-held, and faithfully followed) traditions to save the soul. The effect upon one’s relationship with God is always a distortion of the real. This distorting continues until it jeopardizes one’s salvation by causing souls to trust in tradition rather than Biblical truth for their salvation.

May I remind you, dear Reader, that Jesus spoke soberly about this to those who were “STILL” THE PEOPLE OF GOD until the Day of Pentecost. He spoke “against” things that they had taught and believed as “truth” for generations, even though their traditions/doctrines were not founded directly upon the Word of God. At some point in the past, some sincere man of God started teaching a practice as a “guideline.” But over the course of time, each generation began to teach this practice (and others) more and more strongly and with greater certainty. The longer they were taught, the less their origins and Scriptural foundations were questioned. Assumption and blind obedience replaced inquiry and personal study. While the traditions started out as “convictions,” the “elders/fathers” transformed them into “doctrines.” As a result, the current generation’s salvation was “judged” valid or invalid by the degree of their faithfulness to the traditions.

Jesus was not crucified because He violated the Word of God. He was crucified by the “people of God” because He stood against their long-held and “revered” traditions! This still happens today (to find out if this is true, just take a stand against some “beloved/believed” tradition, and then experience the consequences!)

Jesus died for the sins of all mankind so that He could save their souls; it was God’s only reason for the crucifixion. BUT, the Jews’ motive for crying "Crucify Him" was not so that He could die for the sins of mankind or because man had broken God's law and needed redemption. THEIR REASON for wanting Him crucified was because He violated THEIR traditions and then taught others to do so as well! The religious leaders of that day “purchased” His betrayal in order to PRESERVE both their “doctrines” and their “power” over God’s people.

REMEMBER: GENUINE BIBLICAL TRUTH CAN AND WILL ALWAYS STAND UP UNDER ANY QUESTION, BUT TRADITION CANNOT! THE ONLY RECOURSE THAT TRADITION HAS IS TO “KILL” THE QUESTIONER IN ORDER TO CONCEAL THE FACT THAT THE TRADITION CANNOT BE BIBLICALLY DEFENDED.

TRADITION STEALS THE TRUTH FROM US:

Paul also warned the Church against following traditions created by men:

> Colossians 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, **after the tradition of men**, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.
>
> > Colossians 2:8 (The Message Bible)
> > 8 Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. **They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings** and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that's not the way of Christ.
> >
> > Colossians 2:8 (The Living Bible)
> > 8 Don't let others spoil your faith and joy with their philosophies, their wrong and shallow answers built on men's thoughts and ideas, instead of on what Christ has said.

The Greek word translated “spoil” means: “To carry away. To lead off as prey, carry off as booty, rob, or kidnap. Figuratively, of the destructive effects of false teachers who rob believers of the complete riches available in Christ and revealed in the gospel” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary*). Such is the effect of “innocent,” even beloved pseudo-doctrines — “traditions.” While one holds onto a tradition, he is cheating himself out of searching for and finding the truth.

TEACHING CONVICTIONS AS DOCTRINES IS ACTUALLY CALLED TRADITION.

Ready for more of a teacher’s redundancy?

When I take the position that every other saved person in this fellowship MUST follow all of my convictions or else be lost, then I have changed the Word of God. No place in the Bible is such a concept taught! When a “conviction” is made the equivalent of a doctrine, what actually has transpired is that a “tradition” has been born. Again, Jesus was not crucified because He disobeyed the Law/Word of God. The religious put Him to death for violating their traditions, which they called “the traditions of the elders or fathers.” **In other words, they murdered Jesus because He would not honor their heritage.** How easily we forget that, as a movement, we owe our existence to those who LEFT THEIR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE in pursuit of God, the Truth, the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, etc. at the beginning of the last century!

Thayer's defines the Greek word translated "tradition" in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 as: "the body of precepts, especially ritual, which in the opinion of the later Jews were orally delivered by Moses and orally transmitted in unbroken succession to subsequent generations, **which precepts, both illustrating and EXPANDING the written law, as they did were to be obeyed with EQUAL REVERENCE."** Equal reverence? Our convictions turned pseudo-doctrines (traditions) are EQUAL to the written Word of God? Seriously?!

Webster's defines "tradition" as, **"a long-established custom or practice having the effect of precedent or unwritten law."** Our practices must be based on the Word of God, but MUST NOT be ADDED to it as being its equal! Only the Word of God can be the basis for judging any man (John 12:44-50). I do not have a Biblical right to judge other believers by MY CONVICTIONS (Romans 14:22)!

The Bible very clearly states the danger of adding to the Word of God:

> Deuteronomy 4:2 **Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you**, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.
>
> Proverbs 30:5-6
> 5 Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.
> 6 **Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.**
>
> Revelation 22:18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, **If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:**

Doctrines are principles of God's Word that are established by two or three Biblical witnesses. **Convictions (faith) are valid, good, and necessary; but, they are NOT doctrines!** From a Biblical perspective, I can have faith in (be convinced or persuaded about) doctrines, but my "faith" ("convictions") itself cannot be a doctrine. **We, as men of God, must speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where it is silent.** Otherwise, we risk being guilty of "adding to the Word," which then makes us vulnerable to the curses reserved for the prideful and presumptuous who commit such an offense against God!

WE ARE TO ACCEPT EACH OTHER REGARDLESS OF OUR DIFFERENCES.

I am instructed by the Holy Ghost through the Apostle Paul to mark those who cause divisions and offenses among us because they are teaching and practicing things that are "contrary to the doctrine" (Romans 16:17). AND we are commanded to avoid (Greek - "to shun") them. This separating of ourselves from others MUST be based on them deviating from DOCTRINE — and doctrine alone. This is extremely serious.

However in my lifetime in Pentecost, I have seen far more division in the Body over differences in convictions. How can this be? Because we have not made a Bible-based distinction between doctrines and convictions.

Paul in this same book, Romans, two chapters earlier, told the Church that we are NOT to cause divisions over and/or separate ourselves from Brethren because of differences in convictions. In fact, he told the Romans to receive brothers who are "weak in the faith," "but not to doubtful disputations" (Romans 14:1). Paul also said: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. . . But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:4,10).

> Romans 14:1,4,10 (*The Amplified Version*)
> 1 AS FOR the man who is a weak believer, welcome him [into your fellowship], but not to criticize his opinions or pass judgment on his scruples or perplex him with discussions.
> 4 Who are you to pass judgment on and censure another's household servant? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he shall stand and be upheld, for the Master (the Lord) is mighty to support him and make him stand.
> 10 Why do you criticize and pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you look down upon or despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

In my 67 years of life (all of which have been spent in the UPCI), very few passages of Scripture have been more routinely violated by both leaders and by rank and file ministers throughout the organization than the preceding verses.

To further establish this point, let's consider Paul's examples of differences in convictions among brethren:

> Romans 14:1-10
> 14 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.
> 2 **For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.**

3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.
4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.
5 **One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike.** Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.
6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.
7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.
8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.
9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.
10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

We know from Paul's other discussions on the subject of "meat" that he was specifically referring to meat offered in sacrifice to idols. Meat sacrificed in worship to idols? You're kidding me, right? Yet, one brother can eat it because to him (and his faith) it is JUST meat; he does not see the idol. Another brother's conscience will not let him eat because he sees only the idol and not the meat. Which is right? According to Paul? Both!

Even more importantly, the "meat-eater" and the "meat-abstainer" are NOT supposed to argue/debate about eating or not eating, neither are they to judge each other over their **completely different convictions.** Amazing! Wow! That would surely take A LOT of Holy Ghost and some serious spirituality to do that!

Yet, some would say that accepting our brother even though he differs in his sincerely held convictions is "IMPOSSIBLE" to do! "No way am I going to let God get away with forbidding me to do something that He lets others get away with." "If God won't judge them, then I will." REALLY?

We know from the Old Testament that a man was stoned to death for picking up sticks for a fire on the Sabbath. One of the Ten Commandments is: "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." Yet, Paul said that one brother sees every day as holy unto the Lord, while another says we should honor only the specific day. Who is right? Both!

Thankfully, I AM NOT GOD! Because I have MANY strongly held convictions that my flesh is ready to debate with anyone at any time, it is very difficult for me to receive this admonition of Paul and the Holy Ghost. But, this is the Word of God and by His grace, and ONLY by and through the empowerment of His grace, I will live by it.

IT IS NOT DOCTRINE WHICH DIVIDES US; IT IS OUR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS WHICH WE HAVE MADE INTO DOCTRINES FOR EVERYBODY ELSE!

(More redundancy — same point from a different perspective.)

Again, the words *conviction/convictions* are not found in the *King James Version* of the Bible — anywhere! As was stated above, the Greek word that is translated "convictions" in the *Amplified Version* below is translated "faith" in the *King James*.

> Romans 14:22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.
>
> Romans 14:22 (Amplified Version)
> 22 Your personal convictions [on such matters] — exercise [them] as in God's presence, keeping them to yourself [striving only to know the truth and obey His will]. Blessed (happy, to be envied) is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves [who does not convict himself by what he chooses to do].
>
> Romans 14:22 (The Message Bible)
> 22 Cultivate your own relationship with God, but don't impose it on others. You're fortunate if your behavior and your belief are coherent.

We are going to be judged solely by The Word of God — not by our convictions!

> John 12:47-48
> 47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, **I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world**, but to save the world.
> 48 **He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him *in the last day.***

Do we need to remind ourselves "what" the Word of God is (and isn't)? According to Jesus in John 12:48, the Word of God is "what GOD has spoken," NOT what **we** say it says!

As discussed above, convictions are very important and essential to each of us individually. Convictions are the result of the Holy Ghost applying God's eternal principles to MY personal daily life and walk. Convictions are the boundaries set in MY life by the Holy Ghost that serve as important guidelines for me to the "working out" of my own salvation "in fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

One thing we seem to have not fully acknowledged about God is that He is a God of eternal and unchangeable principles and patterns. He is very rigid and exacting in His principles, but somewhat flexible in how He applies those principles in our lives individually. He knows me — all about me. He knows you, Dear Reader — all about you. The "convictions" that I personally need to help me be saved are based on my "infirmities." Your "infirmities" are different from mine, so your "convictions" given to you by the Holy Ghost will be different from mine. Our doctrines MUST BE the same collectively. **But, it is not Biblically possible for our convictions to be the same unless one of us has forced our convictions upon the other.**

As humans, we bristle at the rules — some even to the point of greatly "resenting" the rules. So, our humanity wants the rules to be the rules for everybody. Every church has the self-appointed "holiness" police that make sure that every new convert is told ALL the rules, sometimes before they can even get dry from the baptistery. Do these "saints" really believe the "Word" that strongly? **NO!!!** In almost every case, they eventually prove that they actually "resent" the "rules;" but, because *they* "have to keep them," they are going to make sure that everyone else keeps them too.

It greatly bothers some "believers" that the Lord may allow others into heaven while they continue to do things that they (the bothered "believers") have been forbidden by God to do. Again, how can this be? Because the Lord knows my heart! Some things that would have virtually no effect on others could be the worst thing for my own weaknesses. Likewise there are some things that I can do that would be a major stumbling block to someone else. To avoid offenses, Paul has admonished us to keep our faith (convictions) to ourselves (Romans 14:22), so that our personal "liberty" will not become a stumbling block to others (1 Corinthians 8:7-13).

TO FURTHER ILLUSTRATE OUR PATTERN OF JUDGING OTHERS BY A CONVICTION, LET'S CONSIDER THE "WEDDING BAND."

There is absolutely no stand taken anywhere in the *Manual of the UPCI* about not wearing a wedding band. No minister has ever signed a ministerial application stating that he would not wear one. Yet, take this revealing test: walk into any gathering of preachers and notice how quickly their eyes glance first at your ring finger and then immediately, if they see a ring, to your face. Talk about feeling like an outcast!

"Ironic" as it may seem, if we look at the hands of the great majority of preachers' wives we will find them wearing wedding rings. Preachers' wives wear wedding rings, but their husbands don't. Why? Because a very small but vocal minority have intimidated the ministry of this fellowship into not wearing a wedding band out of fear of being judged a "sinner."

Is it valid for some to be truly convicted about NOT wearing a wedding band? YES! But is it Biblically right for them to "impose" that conviction on everyone else? NO!

Let me say very quickly here. If I am preaching in another man's church and he asks his people not to wear wedding rings, then I am taking mine off out of respect to him and his people. I will do this gladly and with a clear conscience. However, I personally have a very strong conviction about the NECESSITY of wearing a wedding ring if you are married. Yet, I have never had any visiting minister volunteer to put one on while at our church.

Maryland is NOT the Bible-belt! When a man and a woman check into a hotel here without a wedding band on, it is **automatically** assumed that they are NOT married. When our church is paying for a hotel room and a couple without wedding rings on check in under our church's name, that desk clerk is sure that they are "shacking up."

While we evangelized, my wife had removed her wedding band. When we became Home Missionaries to Annapolis, Maryland, she did not put it back on. Not long after moving here, she became pregnant. On her first visit to the doctor, she was asked if she knew who the father of her child was. Why? She did not have a wedding band on.

When she came home from the doctor and told me what she had been asked, I immediately told her to put her ring back on. Why? The Bible says that we should not let our good be evil spoken of. I know, I know. I have been in this movement long enough to know that some will completely condemn that reasoning. Good thing that they are not my God and that I am His servant and not theirs. Why? Because they would send me to hell for simply having a conviction that differs from theirs. AND it is MY conviction!

Why are so many ministers in our fellowship today reluctant to wear a wedding band, even though it is not THEIR personal conviction? Because many fear being judged! But, it is not the Word of God that they fear being judged by — they fear being judged by people! This judging is not done based upon a Biblical doctrine; but it is done based upon a personal conviction that has been turned into a doctrine! Again, they are being judged on the basis of a conviction that has been imposed on a body of people against their own convictions.

Again, the great, great majority of preachers today who do not wear a wedding ring are NOT doing so because they personally have a conviction against it. Then whose conviction is it that they are living by?

Are there ministers who have a strong personal conviction against wearing a wedding ring? Most definitely, YES! And, I respect them for it. But do they have a right to impose their conviction upon everyone else? Most definitely, NO! But that has not stopped it from happening. Let me quickly state that there are some — including some of my friends — who have such a conviction, BUT they do NOT condemn others whose conviction differs from theirs.

Now, I am not equating TV's and wedding rings. But, the principle is the same: Valid personal convictions that have been turned into unbiblical doctrines that are imposed on the body as a whole. Again, it surely seems that the attitude is: "If God won't let me do it, then nobody else gets to either."

The act of IMPOSING PERSONAL CONVICTIONS upon others is proof positive that one's conviction isn't as firmly rooted in God's Word as some would have you to believe, and it CAN be a symptom of someone who craves control over others.

ARE MEN OF GOD TODAY FOLLOWERS OR LEADERS?

> John 16:13 **Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth:** for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

I have a promise from God that He will guide me into ALL truth! But, for me or any other preacher to publicly state or even act like we have ALL of *THE* truth is self-deception. The promise found in John 16:13 is given to motivate me to seek for Him, to study and search His Word, and to continue to grow in grace and my knowledge of Him. "All truth" does not mean that I will know everything there is to know about Him, but that the entirety of what I do and will come to know about and through Him is ALL true and nothing but the Truth. "To guide" implies movement in the direction of positive

progress on the part of the one being guided. It is impossible for the Lord to guide those who have stopped growing in Him and in their knowledge and understanding of His Word!

I truly fear that we have a genuine shortage of true students of the Word of God today. **I know that men study to preach. But that is the LEAST important reason to study the Bible.** As a man of God, I must study to know for myself — to be able to truly answer my own questions. I must be able to give chapter and verse for EVERYTHING which I personally tell people that they will go to hell for doing or not doing. It is NOT ENOUGH that my father or pastor believed this or that; it MUST BE BY MY PERSONAL FAITH in God's Word that I lead people to heaven.

Paul admonished and instructed Timothy:

> 2 Timothy 3:16-17
> 16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:
> 17 **That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.**

> 2 Timothy 3:16-17 **(The Amplified Version)**
> 16 Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for instruction, for reproof and conviction of sin, for correction of error and discipline in obedience, [and] for training in righteousness (in holy living, in conformity to God's will in thought, purpose, and action),
> 17 **So that the man of God may be complete and proficient, well fitted and thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

While Ephesians 4:11-12 states that the five-fold ministry is for the perfecting (full-equipping) of the saints, Paul's message to Timothy was that **the Man of God was to become fully equipped by his own PERSONAL study of the Word of God!**

As a Man of God, if I am not persuaded by Scripture for myself, then I cannot truly persuade anyone else with Scripture! I cannot claim to have any "doctrines" concerning anything that I have not proved *to* myself, *for* myself.

I know that we all know this story, but perhaps we need to be reminded of it. When David was preparing to fight Goliath, he refused Saul's offer to use his armour and sword. Why? Because David had not proved them. No matter how simplistic it was, he was only able to slay his giants using the weapon he had personally mastered. David was not rejecting the use of armour and swords, proposing that wars should be fought with slings. When he had grown older and had trained with armour and sword and had proven to himself his ability to use them, they became his weapons of choice.

Likewise today, we have men of God who are trying to fight spiritual battles with weapons that they have not proven, AND THEY ARE LOSING THE BATTLE. Biblically, just "holding our own" is not growing (gathering), nor is it pleasing to Jesus. Jesus said that if I am NOT gathering WITH Him, then I AM SCATTERING!

> Matthew 12:30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.
>
> Luke 11:23 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.

As a new convert or even as a saint who is young in the Lord, one can survive spiritually by receiving from someone else's knowledge of the Word and by depending on someone else's relationship with God. **But, this cannot be a permanent condition.** True men of God CANNOT simply repeat what they have been taught! Each of us must find out the truth for ourselves and we must come to the faith (doctrines) for ourselves. I must find my own sword and armour or I will lose my battles with the giants who come my way.

Faith (convictions) that are someone else's are not mine at all. Misusing the un-Scriptural word "convictions" (again, it is not in the *King James Version*) allows us to abuse and misuse the concept. But, when using the word *faith* (which the *King James* does use), no minister would propose to people that anyone could be saved through someone else's FAITH! Again, those who forcefully and adamantly proclaim to one and all that we should follow their convictions (which have been "converted" into pseudo-doctrines) would be viewed as mentally deranged if they preached that each of us must be saved based upon and by that preacher's personal faith. Yet, in fact, that is the spiritual climate in which we are all attempting to live.

NOW WE ARE FACED WITH HAVING TO "PAY THE PIPER." This unbiblical approach eventually catches up with us. How we deal with this will determine our future in God — individually, as a local church, and as a movement. If I am to be castigated for "compromise" because I am espousing a departure from unbiblical practices and a return to Scriptural principles, then so be it! There is someone that I love very much who was murdered for standing against religious tradition — what an honor to be afforded the same treatment as Him! Experiencing persecution is a privilege!

NEW CONVICTIONS IN A DAY?

The “flip” side of this situation is observing ministers who “once” were very strict but now have gone in a completely opposite direction. How many men who have publicly proclaimed themselves to be “conservative” suddenly changed their position seemingly overnight — 180 degrees in some cases? How can “convictions” change in one day?

Here is how: They never truly believed the convictions which they taught in the first place. They were following someone else’s convictions and never made them their own. They preached what they preached to fit in, to belong, to prevent “being judged,” or to “one-up” others with how “strict” they were. At times, in my 67 years of listening to all of this, it seemed like some kind of competition to see who could out “separate” everyone else. How very, very sad and destructive!

When one feels the need to stand in a public meeting of mixed congregations and hammer his own strictures as being heaven and hell issues for all, THAT PERSON is telling you that they do not really believe what they are saying in their heart of hearts. They are being hard on everyone else because they have to be just that hard on themselves. Why? To make sure that they actually try to live by things that they themselves do not fully and truly believe. Apparently for some, if they say something loud enough and long enough, it will eventually become truth. Again, who are they trying to convince? Themselves or Us?

A conviction cannot be a conviction unless a person is convinced (persuaded) of the conviction. Following any teaching because a pastor or leader “tells” you to do it is obedience; it is not faith. Obedience is good for children, but when are our people going to mature into spiritual adults?

People can only have faith ("convictions") when they are taught the Scriptures and convinced of the Biblical validity of God's eternal principles. *Pastor/Teacher* is Biblical terminology (Ephesians 4:11); *Pastor/Preacher* is NOT! Saints of God can ONLY mature by being taught the Word of God. NO amount of preaching will precipitate and/or facilitate maturity in believers!

By definition “Disciples” are “taught or trained” ones — NOT “preached to” ones. Preaching doctrines or convictions instead of teaching them will produce short-term obedience in people, but the eventual result is long-term hypocrisy in the same people. Again, by the definition of the Greek word, a “doctrine” is what is “TAUGHT.”

John the Baptist was a preacher; Jesus was a teacher. John had a few disciples (almost by accident and even most of them left him). Jesus was first and foremost a “disciple-maker.” John (the preacher) had to decrease so that Jesus (the teacher) could increase. This is God’s pattern and principle, not mine.

Preaching (proclaiming) gets people into the church; but, teaching (explaining) keeps them there and grows them into "fully-equipped" laborers (Ephesians 4:12) in God's harvest. If this is "Book," and it is, then why don't we do what is Biblical and effective? Could it be because it only takes a little bit of work to "tell" someone WHAT to do, but it takes a considerable amount of time invested in prayer and study to be able to explain to them WHY they should do it? Teaching people does not leave a lot of time for "toys" and "play." It is work, but what blessed work it is!

How many men of God are there in the Apostolic movement today who really, truly KNOW what THEY believe? Or, how many are still just following what their pastor or their dad taught them. Surely, that is a good starting point, but that it is all it is — only good to a point and only a start. The object of any race or endeavor is the finish line, NOT the start.

Until I am ready and willing to die for what I believe, then I do not truly believe it! Even if the Lord never requires me to physically die for my faith, I am expected to "die daily" for it. Many of us struggle to walk a consistent, daily walk. Why? Is it because we do not believe what we believe strongly enough to "give up" our lives for it? Do we try to "live and work for" God while still maintaining ultimate control over ourselves and our lives (one definition of "not being dead")?

The most important factor that influences true growth — both in God for us personally and in our churches numerically — is the death of the seed. *We* are the seed:

> John 12:24-25
> 24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.**
> 25 **He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.**

We must be willing to die out both to ourselves and to this world if we want to see genuine Biblical revival and harvest. But, we will not die because of someone else's faith. We will only die for our own faith. Those who persist in maintaining control of their lives and themselves are dead (spiritually) while they claim to live. We must die to live! But, we will NOT die for something that we do not truly and fully believe in for ourselves! The old saying is: "You have never begun to live unto you find something worth dying for!"

VACCINATION PRODUCES IMMUNITY

Our people (and preachers) are struggling with their use of the internet because they have no spiritual immunity to its content. Our traditional position against having a TV has not allowed for "vaccination" while using the lesser; therefore, we are "dying" spiritually at the hands of the greater.

There is NOT a single church in our fellowship that does not have internet abusers sitting in their seats and participating on their platforms. The countless hours that the average Apostolic, especially those under 40, spends online (even doing "non-sinful" things like social networking) is astounding.

Easily obtainable statistics demonstrate that TV is by far NOT the favored choice of entertainment technology or activity of the under 40 crowd. We as a movement are so stressed out over an issue that is dead; we just haven't had the funeral yet. Please bring on the funeral. We need some "closure" so that we can move on, allowing us to preach and teach the Bible and only the Bible.

Because we took a position against how content was delivered instead of teaching the Biblical principles for governing what the eye is exposed to, we rendered our people vulnerable to "spiritual viruses and diseases." It has been estimated that over 10 times more Native Americans were killed by diseases carried to North America by Europeans than by all the wars fought with them and violence perpetrated against them combined. Why? Because the diseases were new and the Native Americans had no built-up immunity to them. As a movement in general, our people have NO spiritual immunity against the content on the internet.

TV was the gnat; the internet is the camel. No one but those with self-inflicted blindness could possibly claim that TV is worse than the internet. The reason some have tried to make this totally spurious argument? After seeing the flaws and futility of the "thou shall not have the device approach" with TV, they are making unprecedented attempts to use the "Biblical principle against content approach" with the internet. So, in order to cover our backsides with people who have been **hammered** for years over not having a TV, we futilely attempt to "explain" why we are NOW approaching the use of the internet differently. With the lines being so completely blurred between the traditional TV and all other communication/entertainment technologies, our "thou shall not" approach is failing miserably and is being revealed for what it is: Obsolete!

I dare most pastors to conduct an honest poll of their people (by secret ballot) and ask them this question: "In your opinion, which is worse and more dangerous to someone's spirituality: TV or the internet?" The people already know the answer to that question, but *we* are trying to avoid facing the answer because we have to justify 50 plus years of "rule-making doctrine."

For the "rule-maker" to be consistent, all technology that could be used in any way to watch traditional TV content MUST be banned! Of course, very, very few pastors have even dared to attempt to take that approach. It is not going to fly any more. We are either going to do things Biblically rather than traditionally, OR we are going to cease to exist as a viable, vital, and vibrant church and/or organization.

To be vaccinated against a disease, a small and controlled amount of the disease is introduced into the body, thus forcing the body to create "anti-bodies" to fight against that specific disease. "I Love Lucy," "My Three Sons," "Leave it to Beaver," "Little House on the Prairie," etc. were the vaccination. But, we totally demonized all of them and pontificated, "Don't you dare watch this." Well, the disease is so far worse than the vaccination that now we look like fools to our own kids. Those "damnable" TV shows are today considered "wholesome" "family entertainment" by most. When did they get so tame?

We can make all the excuses we want about why so many of our kids are not living for the Lord today, but I found ways to vaccinate mine. I am POSITIVE that my sons' families have also been exposed to the "disease," but the "anti-bodies" are working (so far) even though the latest strains of the disease are worse than could ever have been imagined 50 years ago.

Will we have to experience what the Israelites did when they lost a whole generation before God would allow them to go into the Promised Land? I hope not. But now our only hope is to change the "treatment" of the disease. We must approach the "sickness" Biblically instead of just blindly and emotionally clinging to the approach that our "heritage" used. Where are the Hezekiahs who will stand up and break that which we have been "burning incense to" for all these years and rightfully proclaim it "Nehustan"?

IF "TV" IS TAKEN "OUT OF" *THE MANUAL*, ARE WE "COMPROMISING"?

Of course, many will say "YES" with great volume and passion.

But, what does it mean to *compromise*? *Dictionary.com* defines *compromise* as: "A settlement of differences by mutual concessions; an agreement reached by adjustment of conflicting or opposing claims, principles, etc., by reciprocal modification of demands. An endangering, especially of reputation; exposure to danger, suspicion, etc."

Is it *compromise* to admit that after we have been using a non-biblical approach to a situation, we are now "repenting" and returning to the Biblical approach? It would seem to me that the "compromise" took place many years ago when we first put a religious

approach ahead of a spiritual and Biblical approach. Are we then "compromising" by correcting a compromise? We as a movement "compromised" when the rule-makers (proclaimers but not explainers) forced an un-Biblical approach upon us for dealing with TV in the first place! Is not Romans 14 just as much Scripture as Acts 2:38? Maybe we should change our motto as a movement from "preaching the whole gospel, to the whole world" to "preaching the whole Bible, to the whole world" and see if that gives us any guidance concerning how to approach things in the future.

As I wrote earlier under the section entitled, "What Is the Biblical Doctrine Concerning the Use of All Technology?", NO RULE could ever be made that is stronger or more convicting than the three "witnesses" provided in that section and repeated here:

> Psalms 101:3 **I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes:** I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.
>
> Matthew 5:28-30
> 28 But I say unto you, **That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.**
> 29 **And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.**
>
> Psalms 119:33-37
> 33 Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.
> 34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.
> 35 Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.
> 36 Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.
> 37 **Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.**

(For a 40 plus page study entitled, "The Biblical Principle Governing the Eyes," go to myapw.com or apostoliciron.com. It is free.)

Many argue about and against the validity of our existing "rule," but NO ONE can argue over the clear teaching of the eternal Biblical principle. Why do we inflict our rules (convictions) upon others? Because we are afraid that the Lord is going to let them go to heaven doing stuff that we really want to do but can't. We want EVERYONE to do only what we are allowed to do — no more! It seems that we have never heard of the concept of letting each servant stand or fall to his own master. If leaving this mess behind and returning to sound and irrefutable Biblical principles and teaching is compromising, then just call me a "compromiser." Nevertheless, my Master calls me a "good and faithful servant." Guess whose approval is most important to me?

Ultimately, we who are members of the UPCI are going to have to decide which takes precedence — in the UPCI, in our churches, and in our personal lives — our traditions, or the Bible? We cannot change the Bible or we become sinners. But changing the *Manual* does not make us sinners, especially if we are changing it to reflect a more Biblically-based principle-oriented position.

To be sure some will threaten: "If we do this, ministers will leave us." Possibly so. But, Jesus had casualties to His teachings too. There were things He taught and positions He took that were contrary to the religious rules and traditions of His day. Initially, many left Him. Then, when the Holy Ghost's conviction over His open public rejection of their sacred cows got to be more than they could handle, they killed Him. What a way to go! Should we feel threatened by being treated like Him and in "fellowshipping" with Him in His sufferings?

Jesus and His disciples were judged for not keeping the traditions of the "fathers and the elders." When faced with a choice between heritage and the Bible, which will you choose?

Ultimately and sadly, the debate on this issue will be centered on the wrong thing — whose "position" will win (will we continue in the "old paths" or will "compromise" win). Unfortunately, that "competition" will be engaged in to the neglect of an honest and open examination of the Bible to see how God's Word would solve this conundrum and disperse the "tumult" that this subject invariably produces. Would it not be a wonderful thing if God's Word and His Ways won in one of these debates, at least this once? In Jesus' name, let it be so!

cmwright

PLEASE NOTE: That the views of the writer of this article are his own and are not intended to represent the views of any other individual or church, district, or organization. This statement is not intended to take the credit, just the blame.