

Correct Application of Scripture

by Neil Short

It's interesting to observe the hermeneutic (method of scriptural interpretation) some groups use. Some use Mark 16:18 as proof that Christians should handle dangerous snakes – not only as a sign but also as a part of their worship services. Church members are occasionally bitten. Unlike Paul in Acts 28:3-6, these people often become very sick and sometimes die.



Mark Wolford

One such incident occurred on May 28, 2012 at Panther State Forest in McDowell County, West Virginia. During an outdoor Memorial Day worship service, snake-handling preacher Mark Randall “Mack” Wolford, 44, was fatally bitten by his pet rattlesnake Sheba.

Is there authority in Mark 16 to deliberately do dangerous things?

I'm reminded of the Lord's response when Satan tempted Him to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple. Satan quoted scripture indicating that it would be a safe stunt; but Jesus said, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

John Wesley says about Mark 16:18, simply, “God never calls us to try any such experiments.”

What Does James 1:17 Say About God's Nature?

The passage most plausibly cited in support of God's

ontological [a natural property/characteristic] immutability [unchangeableness] is no doubt James 1:17, in which it is said that with God “there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Let's have before us the preceding verse along with the verse following:

Do not be deceived, my beloved. Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. (Jas 1:16-18, NRSV)

The writer appears to be working with the image of a beam of light shining on a rotating object, different parts of the object falling into shadow as the object rotates. God, he says, is not like such an object; God is like the light. The writer has just told his readers that when they are tempted to do evil, they must not ascribe that temptation to God; “God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one” (Jas 1:13). God is the source only of what is good – God is the sole source of good. In that respect God is like a source of light in which there is “no variation or shadow due to change.”

Is the writer of James here affirming God's ontological immutability? I think the most we can say is that though it's possible he's doing that, it's not likely. It's likely that what he's saying is that God is unchangeable in that God is never the source of evil, only and always of good – which falls far short of affirming ontological immutability. Yet the context does not entitle one to dismiss entirely the possibility that the writer was alluding to God's ontological immutability. That would go beyond what his argument required, yet he might nonetheless have been alluding to it as grounding his argument. But if these considera-

tions are correct – though it's not likely that the writer was alluding to ontological immutability, the possibility that he was doing so cannot be decisively dismissed – then obviously this passage cannot be used as a proof text for ontological immutability.

I conclude that the situation for God's ontological immutability is like that for God's timelessness: there are no passages in Scripture which can be cited as supporting the doctrine.

Nicholas Wolterstorff. "Unqualified Divine Temporality" in *God & Time: Four Views*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001. 192-193.

-----News-----

Cindy Waller's brother **Daryl** passed away Wednesday evening about 8:30 PM in Topeka Kansas in his room. Keep Cindy in your prayers.

Mike and Sandy have a new granddaughter, Megan had the baby. Aubriana 8 pounds 10 ounces 21 inches. August 9th.

Michelle Collins' brother **Joey** is having marital problems.

Jerry Robinson is scheduled for a stress test on August 22.

Deanna Armenta's uncle **Fred** passed away. Her sister **Patsy**, has cancer and her time seems to be drawing short. Her daughter **April** is suffering from Pulmonary Embolism.

Chuck Brooks (Cody Bo's dad) is scheduled for surgery on September 5.

Prayer List

Healing: *Deanna Armenta's daughter April and sister Patsy; Chuck Brooks, Faye Atchley, Nicolas Self, Douglas Gardner; Brandon (Gerry Clark's grandson), Diane Cocke's brother-in-law Dave Smith, Ben Atchley, Dave Morse, Richard Tuey.*

Sympathy: *Cindy Waller, Deanna Armenta. Personal: Michelle Collins' brother Joey, Richard and Skeet Posey, Members of the Morenci church. Travels: John and Sharon Cunningham.*

CHURCH OF CHRIST

3888 S Hwy 191, Safford, AZ 85546

12 August 2012

Sermon Topics

A.M. Our God is Faithful in Forgiveness

John 3:16-17

P.M. Obey and Submit to the Authority of Your Leaders

Hebrews 13:17

Evangelist

Ken Knowlton: 428-5974

Elders

Ben Atchley: 428-2246

Greg Briggs: 428-8756

John Cunningham: 428-0895

Services

Sunday Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship	11:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesday Evening Class	6:30 P.M.